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LIGHTNING BOLT, THE CANYON TERROR; Or, THE MOUNTAIN CAT'S GRUDGE.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON,

AUTHOR OF "CACTUS JACK," "DON SOMBRERO," "LADY JAGUAR," "THE SCORPION BROTHERS," "CANYON DAVE," ETC., ETC.



LIGHTNING BOLT, WITH A WILD YELL OF DERISION, SENT A PARTING GRENADE AMONG THE TERRIFIED RED SKINS.

Lightning Bolt, THE CANYON TERROR;

OR,

The Mountain Cat's Grudge.

BY CAPT. MARK WILTON,

AUTHOR OF "TEXAS CHICK," "IRON-ARMED ABE," "CACTUS JACK," "LEOPARD LUKE," "BULLET HEAD," "BAR-RANCA BILL," "LONG-HAIRED MAX," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOUNTAIN DEMON.

"QUICK, thar, young feller; git off ther ledge, or you'll git off never to git up. Scoot!"

It was a wild piece of country in the mountains of western Montana, a division of our country particularly rich in such scenes; and a scene where one man's life was certainly exposed to great peril.

He who had shouted stood on an elevated point of rocky land, where an abrupt descent on one side was only broken by a ledge running around it like a balcony of Nature. And on the ledge the man above saw a scene which made him drive a bullet into his rifle in hot haste.

A second man stood on the ledge, as did a third object of an animate and animal nature—a grizzly bear. Eph and the man had met on the narrow rock and both seemed surprised. The latter had occasion to be alarmed, as well.

The bear was in a passion; something had occurred to ruffle his never-too-amiable temper, and when one noticed the drops of red which dripped from his shaggy breast and spotted the ledge, it was not hard to get at the nature of his mental ebullition.

Waldo Temple saw and realized his danger. Old Eph is only slain off-hand in the stories of Nimrods of the Munchausen order, who never had the courage even to face one, and it is only the sure hand, steady eye and unflinching courage that can win at all. Temple knew this and would gladly have retreated, but he saw better than his friend above that retreat meant sure death.

He must face the grizzly and take his chances.

The beast had paused and was looking at him with an ugly gleam in his vicious eyes, and Waldo resolved to improve his chance without stopping to inquire why it was presented.

He dropped on one knee and raised his rifle.

Eph beheld the movement with dissatisfaction and a surly growl, and one of his feet moved forward, followed by the rest of his anatomy. His expression was ugly in the extreme and there could be no doubt but he intended to sweep his neighbor off the ledge to the ragged rocks below, or crush him in his resistless hold.

All this was clear to Temple, yet he was perfectly calm. He wondered at it afterward. His gaze did not waver as he glanced along the rifle-barrel, and he had confidence in the weapon.

The man above had finished reloading, but he leaned over the cliff and made no motion, well aware that he could send no fatal shot from his position; all depended on that of the imperiled man.

"Steady, boyee, steady! Make sure o' yer aim, an' give it ter him plump in ther eye. Don't—"

His further speech was checked by the sharp crack of the rifle, and then Temple flung himself flat and clutched his knife for the grizzly's rush. It never came. The animal started, as the lead went home, reeled, stepped one foot over the ledge, and then went out of sight with a somersault.

His fate was settled; the rocks a hundred feet below would be the landing-place.

The man above the ledge uttered a whoop and then came down, by means of a detour, as quickly as possible. He found Temple calmly placing a fresh shell in his rifle.

"You've did it now, by beeswax! You've taken ther last degree in mountain-craft, fur ther man that kin lay over a grizzly ain't no fool. I say it, an' I'm a hunter o' ther old stock, Gaffer Golightly, by name!"

The men shook hands, and though the victor bore his honors meekly, there was a pleased flush on his face. He was a young man, from whom mountain life had not removed certain evidences of Eastern origin, but he had a sensible, manly face, and wore his clothes for use rather than ornament.

His companion was twice his age, but fifty years set lightly upon him and he was as tough as a knot; a thin, wiry man, with a homely, honest face, and a general air which told that he was a veteran amid the wild scenes of the West.

His claim that he was "a hunter of the old stock" was corroborated by the rifle he bore. It was not only a muzzle-loader, but was of such ancient pattern that one instinctively wondered

if it had not descended from Daniel Boone. Yet Gaffer Golightly was no fossil; two excellent revolvers were visible at his belt.

After one look at the mangled heap at the foot of the cliff, which represented all that was left of Old Eph, the men ascended the rocks and stood on the upper part of the ridge.

The wild scenery stretched away in every direction, and nowhere could they see an end of the mountains and woods except at the east, where a valley was scooped out of the hills—not in the form of a plain, but rather a depression, where the bolder features of the elevated country became dwarfed and softened. Through the valley extended a thread of silver. It was the Missouri river, but not the broad and mighty stream which pours a small ocean of water into its great companion, the Father of Waters.

For the scene was in Montana, and there the Missouri, not yet strengthened by the tributaries it receives after turning its course eastward, is but the lusty infant which, as it sweeps on, grows to the giant of its maturer days.

"I see ye're a-lookin' down ther valley," said Gaffer Golightly. "Mebbe you see the enterprisin' town o' Quartz Rock?"

"No," Temple admitted.

"Eye ther stream clostly, then. Down at ther foot of the pine ridge yender you kin see whar ther Missouri spreads out like ther bowl o' a spoon. Thar is bluffs on both sides o' ther river except whar ther bowl is—"

"I see the village now; it is just beyond the bowl, as you call it."

"Right, young feller. That is Quartz Rock, an' ef we are a-goin' thar we may ez well be on ther way. Shall we start now?"

"I am all ready."

They went on and soon left the scene of their late adventure behind them, but the day was destined to bring forth yet a more startling experience, and one ranging on the domain of the marvelous.

They were passing along the top of a canyon when Gaffer suddenly looked behind him, and, as he did so, he caught Temple's arm in a grasp that threatened to leave its mark.

"Look!" the hunter uttered, surprise and amazement in his voice.

The younger man obeyed, and did not need to ask to what Golightly referred.

Across the ridge a huge buck elk was running at full speed, his nimble legs scarcely seeming to touch the ground, though, in point of fact, each great bound was distinctly marked; while his head, which was held proudly erect, was never turned sideways as he ran. A magnificent fellow he was, with his unusual size, his handsome body and shapely limbs, while the size and spread of his antlers were as far beyond the average as was his size.

But the half is not yet told.

The elk had a rider. Seated on his back as though he was calmly bestriding a steed of equine character, rode a man. He was a strange-looking person, seeming to be above the usual stature of men, and a long black beard which swept his breast added to his impressive appearance.

His attire was peculiar, so far as it could be seen. A small, close-fitting cap, without visor or ornament, covered his head, while from his shoulders descended a black garment like the gown of a monk. Drawn in at the waist by belt or cord, it hung loosely around his body, while the skirt concealed his lower limbs nearly to the ankle. It was to be seen, however, that his feet rested in some sort of stirrup, and the natural inference was that a saddle covered the elk's back.

Only a side view of either of the strange twain could be had, but Temple fancied he could discover a look on the rider's face which was grave, dignified and almost lofty; but the strangeness of his dress and his steed amazed the young man.

"Down!" exclaimed Golightly, sharply. "They're rushin' inter a trap; ther kenyon will stop 'em, an' they'll hev ter turn this way. Then, lay low, or you'll get yer head blowed off!"

Temple scarcely heeded him; he could only stand still and watch.

Straight on toward the canyon rushed the elk, leaping over rocks and pursuing his way steadily and tirelessly, never turning his head; and, despite his speed, showing no alarm or inconvenience at having a rider.

The latter was as impassive as the elk. Sitting easily in his place, he rode on, and looked ever straight ahead.

"I tell ye ter git down!" Gaffer repeated. "That durned critter will stave ye ter pieces—I give ye far warning. Ye know him so wal ez I do, or— Good Lord! he's running smack inter ther kenyon."

Sure enough, the buck was still speeding toward the mountain cleft—a place where a small stream worked its way north, three hundred feet below, and perpendicular walls arose on both sides.

Temple expected to see the two dashed to pieces, but as the elk reached the canyon's edge he arose in the air with a magnificent bound, and, while his rider sat unmoved in his place,

went over the chasm like a bird upon the wing. Even at their distance, the hunters heard the thud of his feet as he struck; but, remaining unshaken on his limbs, he gathered for a fresh bound, and like a flash sped on; passed a point of rock and was gone from view, rider and all.

"Thank ther Lord!" uttered Gaffer Golightly, as he slowly arose.

"Gaff, what in the world do you call that creature? Is it one—a new form of Centaur—or are they two?"

The frightened look on the veteran's face gave way to a smile.

"I reckon they is two," he answered; "but ef you take 'em ter be any ord'nary elk an' man, you're mistook."

"Ordinary? I should call them anything but that."

"You don't understand. That was Lightning Bolt an' his Giant Elk."

"I understand less than before. Sit down and tell me just what they are."

"Wal, ez fur ther last, it's Old Nick on hoss-back, but ter make all plain I must go back ter ther time ther critters was fust heard on. It was two year ago—mebbe more—that a hunter come inter some camp, an' tole a yarn about seein' a man ridin' a whoppin' big buck elk over ther mount'in', at a rate o' speed which puts a hoss, or an' eagle, ter shame; an' he claimed that when he tried ter stop ther pair, ther rider flung a ball o' fire at him, which narrowly missed ther mark, an' then scooted out o' sight."

"Folks laughed at ther relationer, an' called him a liar; but he stuck ter ther story like grim death. Pooty soon another voice was heard. A yarn floated up that ther Blackfoot Injuns had see d jest sech a critter, an' when they tried ter stop him he flung more bolts o' fire, an' in that case they tuk effect an' severial warriors was killed."

"From that time on we frequently heard o' ther strange pair, an' he's killed a powerful pile o' whites an' reds, an' thar kin be no doubt but he's either Old Nick or one o' his followers. Ther Blackfeet call him ther Evil Spirit, while 'mongst our folks he mostly goes by ther name o' Lightning Bolt, ther Elk Rider."

"Why Lightning Bolt?—because he moves so fast?"

"No, no! Didn't I tell ye about ther balls o' fire? That's ther way he does his slayin'. He jest chucka a small, round ball, which is all ableeze, an' when it gets ter its victim it bu'sts an' blows him inter nothin'. Them ez know says it's ther same with lightning from ther sky. I never see'd a man killed by it, but I've see'd trees torn all ter nothin'. Wal, that's done by bolts from ther sky, superior-human missyles, ye see, an' ther Elk Rider uses ther same thing."

"Nonsense, Gaff. Lightning—the real article, I mean—is electricity—"

"Call it that, or lightnin' bolt, or thunder-bolt, it don't make no diff'rence; but when it hits it knocks ther stuffin' outer ev'rything. You can't tell me nothin' 'bout that!"

Temple tried no further, but he *did* take a stand against the claim that the Elk Rider was using the same missiles as were employed in a thunder-shower.

Again he was unsuccessful. Mr. Golightly, who was pleasant, sensible and teachable on every other subject, was as stubborn as man can be where Lightning Bolt was concerned, and it was plain he labored under superstitious fear.

"I don't know nothin' about yer sciences, logics, nor metaphysics," he said, "but you needn't try ter tell me what ther Elk Rider is, an' what he hain't. I say ther Injuns is right, an' that he's a critter let loose by Old Nick ter scourge an' slay. 'Course he is! Did ye ever see a man canterin' 'round on an elk that way? Did ye ever see an elk that could get over ther ground that way? I guess not! I say they're both on 'em supernatural bein's, sent from Old Nick. Ez fur ther missyles he uses, what be they ef they ain't lightnin' bolts?"

"Some sort of hand-grenade."

"Hand grenadier!" retorted Mr. Golightly. "Talk sense, will ye? Wal, ef my theory is wrong, what is that durned critter gallopin' 'round ther Rockies fur, anyhow?"

"I think he's mad."

"You'll think he's mad ef he ever gits a whack at you!" retorted Gaffer, with a derisive snort. "Oh! you jest wait till he gits arter you; that's all!"

"I have no desire to meet him—"

"No, I reckon you ain't—I reckon not!"

The compressed sarcasm of his speech made Temple laugh, and he struck him a friendly blow on the shoulder.

"Well, we won't quarrel about that, old friend. Let the Elk Rider be Old Nick or a human being, it don't matter as long as he don't get his grip on us."

"Don't be so sure he won't," said Golightly, fully restored to good-humor. "He comes an' goes like ther wind. A minute ago he was hyar; now he may be rampaging along ther Bitter Root, or the Muscle Shell, or up by Fort Benton. He kin kiver ground jest ez he sees fit, an'

that durned elk never gets out o' wind, ye know."

"Did you ever try your rifle on him?"

"On a speerit?"

"On Lightning Bolt?"

"Sence you're so sot, I hev. Not lately; I know better. But a year ago I took a drive at him. All ther Injuns had been drivin' away at him, and piles o' whites had done ther same; an' ez it war no go, all had settled down ter ther theorum he was a speerit. Now, I ain't a man ter be took in by no humbug, an' I allowed I would try a hack at ther critter, an' that when I did it he would lay down. Young feller, I tried it. I drawed as pooty a bead on him ez you ever see'd an' pulled ther trigger. I couldn't have missed ef I tried, but ther Elk Rider went a-sailin' on his way ez serenely ez though nothin' uncommon had occurred. Now, ther?"

Mr. Golightly considered the question settled, but Waldo Temple was not so sure. Having no belief in spirits he did not accept the common theory. But what then was the strange rider? His appearance was far from being that of a madman; he was more like a grave and impressive fortune-teller, who seeks to strike with awe those who seek his presence.

Yet Temple was forced to admit there was something wonderful and uncanny about the way in which the strange steed and his strange rider had gone over rocks and canyon.

CHAPTER II.

MISSOURI, THE FERRY-GIRL.

WHEN the two men had somewhat recovered from the effects of their last encounter they resumed their way toward Quartz Rock.

"I ain't over an' above sure we shall be welcome," observed Golightly.

"Well, I suppose the country is free to all, isn't it?" Temple replied.

"Ef he kin elbow his way through, but he's got ter take his chances ag'in' Boundin' Bison's Injuns, an' ther town o' Quartz Rock is a leetle select, ez it were. They are makin' a good thing in gold an' don't keer fur more citizens."

"Well, I don't want to settle, nor to dig gold, so I don't see as they can object to our coming, but if any ring has got control here and expects to keep it, they will find themselves infernally up a stump. Montana has a future; her eastern portion is suitable for grazing and these mountains for mining; and as Uncle Sam owns all these broad acres her course is going to be upward and onward. If gold has been struck at Quartz Rock, the fact will become known and there will be a rush of diggers. They can't be kept away. Do these first settlers resort to violence to maintain their exclusiveness?"

"Oh, Lord, no! They sorter frown on newcomers, an' tell 'em about ther hard winters an' ther Blackfeet."

Temple smiled.

"Who rules the roost?"

"One Isaac Leonard, ter wit. He ain't a bad man, an' always uses me wal, but he impresses on my mind that I orter advise other folks ter keep away."

"Do you lend yourself to his ignoble purposes?" asked Temple, with a curling lip.

The hunter paused and grounded his rifle.

"Stranger, I reckon you don't quite know me, yit. I am Gaffer Golightly, an' I am a hunter o' ther old stock. I am a free man, an' I go an' come when an' whar I will. Men, nur rivers, nur mount'ns can't limit my wanderin's. I own no master but Him who is ther Master o' all humans. Over an' above, I trust I am an honest man, an' above lendin' myself ter Ike Leonard, or any other man!"

The speech was made with a sort of homely dignity which won Waldo Temple's heart, and he asked the old-stock hunter's pardon frankly. Peace was restored and their progress resumed.

They neared the Missouri, at the point where it washed the front of the mining town, and Gaffer looked around with a twinkle in his gray eyes.

"Be you good fur a swim?" he asked.

"Yes, if necessary."

"Wal, 'tain't necessary. Ther river hez a ferry byer, an' I am about ter introduce ter you ther pootiest specimen o' ther female sex in Montana."

"Perfectly right," Temple carelessly replied.

"Ther ferry is owned by a gal who ain't see'd twenty year yet. It consists o' a light boat in which she takes over parties o' not more than three, and a bigger craft fur big parties an' fur horses. The last is managed by two niggers, brothers, whose names is G. Wash Adams and T. Jeff Adams."

Temple smiled.

"By which I suppose the girl is named Joan of Arc, or Grace Darling."

"No, she ain't," said Gaffer, with a grunt of disapproval. "I don't jestly know her real name, but she goes under ther *sober-cat*, ez they say in French, o' 'Missouri.' Them as know her best usually clip that down to 'Soo.'"

"A fanciful name, surely."

"But you'll find her practical enough, an' able ter claw yer eyes outer yer head ef ye

make any cheap talk. Be as keerful ez yer natur' will allow. Hyar's ther river an' ther ford. One thing more; it may seem a leetle tough fur me an' you ter set in ther boat an' let a gal pull us across, but don't ye dare ter ask leave ter use the oars. She won't bear it!"

"She won't get a chance to refuse. I had just as soon she would do the work as not."

Temple did not intend to be heartless, but he had mentally set the ferry-girl down to be an Amazon, and Gaffer's half-concealed admiration did not have the effect of arousing enthusiasm on his part. He could respect a girl who thus earned her living, even though she was coarse, large-boned and rude, but admire her—no!

They reached the river and, as both boats were on the other side, Golightly had to signal for the small craft. As he did so, Temple looked curiously at the river.

Above them it descended so rapidly for some distance that, being penned in between rocky walls of Nature's own make, and flowing over successive miniature falls, it was lashed to a white foam until, being shot out of the mouth of the canyada as from a mill-flume, it touched the broad and placid pond on which plied the boat. Because the pond was so much wider than above or below, and because of the color of the water, it was known as Brown Hand Ferry.

Leaving the pond, the water entered another miniature canyon where, with perpendicular walls on both sides, it raced down to find another level place where it could rest. All these detailed points are of interest to the future of our chronicle.

Temple finally aroused from his survey of the scenery and looked out over the ferry. The small boat had answered Gaffer's signal and was approaching them, its sole occupant being the mistress of the outfit. The craft advanced steadily and Temple surveyed the ferry-girl with curiosity.

She was of smaller stature than he expected, and he could not help noticing that her movements were free and graceful. Of her face he could see nothing as she rowed.

They had remained standing on a small ledge, for Gaffer wished to give his companion a chance to look well to the ferry and the village beyond, but as the boat neared the river's bank they turned and started down, making a *detour* to avoid the almost perpendicular descent.

This was nearly done when, as the boat touched land, two other men started out from among the rocks and, before the astonished girl could remonstrate, had taken places in the craft.

"All right, Miss Missouri; pull away!" said one.

Gaffer and Temple had stopped short, a good deal surprised, but the ferry-girl quickly recovered her presence of mind.

"It ain't all right, and I won't 'pull!' she retorted. "Just you get out of the boat and take your turn, will you?"

"Eh? Take our turn! What do you mean?" the previous speaker asked, in real or pretended surprise.

"I mean that I came over after these other gentlemen, and you'll have to wait until they are over."

"But we were here first."

"Perhaps so, but you didn't signal."

"Certainly, we did. I'll leave it to Mike."

"Ay coorse we did," added his companion. "Be jabbers, I nearly flapped me arrums off a-wavin' av dhem, an' it's meself is thinkin' it's about toime fur a new hand at dhe ferry if yez can't attend to business."

"Don't you worry about *that*; I run this ferry, and if you don't like my line you can walk. You'll find it good exercise. But, when you say you tried so hard to signal me you know you're lying. I've watched this point for half an hour, and there was no signal until Gaffer and his companion came. You needn't lie to me; you may as well tumble out and wait your turn!"

Waldo Temple looked and listened in amazement.

He had seen the ferry-girl plainly, at last. She stood upright in her boat, revealing a form of average height, but very compactly built without the least approach to coarseness or masculineness in look. Her dress was a plain, serviceable brown, with a snowy-white collar and red ribbon at her throat; a neat, modest and becoming attire.

But her face was her chief attraction. A round, rosy, almost perfectly formed one, with plenty of color from good health and the mountain winds and sun; with great, dusky eyes, and brown hair which persisted in rippling gloriously, despite all efforts to confine it.

And this was Temple's "Amazon!"

He came, he saw, he was conquered. At first sight he acknowledged her a wonderfully pretty girl, and when he heard the talk of the usurpers of their places in the boat he was filled with indignation.

They did not make a very becoming pair. One was a man of thirty years, with plenty of kind gifts from Nature in the shape of form and face, but there was a dissipated, reckless look on his face, and Temple, who had seen life in other parts of the West, marked his flashy

dress and pronounced him a gambler, at first sight.

His companion was undoubtedly an Irishman, and he looked to be of the lowest class, despite the fact that he was somewhat smartly dressed. Gaffer had quietly waited to see what Missouri would say to the men's claims, but he now advanced.

"Be careful what language you use, girl!" cautioned the flashily-dressed man.

"Oh! the truth don't set well, I see. Well, don't put in any false claims then," she replied. "All you've got to do now is to get out and wait your turn."

"I shall not get out!" he declared.

A hand tapped him on the shoulder and he looked around and saw Gaffer Golightly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jack Purcell," said the old stock-hunter, "but ef Miss Soo says git out, you're agoin' ter git!"

The announcement was quietly made, but with a world of quiet resolution.

"What've you got to do about it?" demanded Purcell, hotly.

"Wal, sence you hev my place in the boat, I am *slightly* interested in *that* way, but when I say right up an' down what I did say, I'll remind you Miss Soo is boss o' this ferry, an' what she sez is goin' that way. You hev heerd her say 'Git!' an' now I want ter see you a-gittin'. Never mind ther bugle, Miss Soo; we don't need ther colored gents."

"By Judas! you'll need them and an army more if you lay a hand on me!" raved Jack Purcell. "I don't allow any two-legged man to eucher me out of my right, and I'll shoot the first lump of carrion that tries it!"

"Me, too!" added his ally. "Me name is Mike Mulloy, an' I'm a spile-driver on wheels. Death to dhe terrier who teches us! Who wants his skull cracked open?"

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED WELCOME.

WALDO TEMPLE was disgusted by the ways and words of this loud-mouthed pair, who bore the stamp of their lawless and contemptible natures upon them, and he was already and anxious to help Gaffer dispose of them. He said as much in a low tone, but the hunter did not heed him.

"You're obstructin' ther wheels o' trade," Gaffer said, still addressing Purcell.

"I'll obstruct your head, if you don't clear out!" was the retort.

The words had scarcely passed his lips when Gaffer leaped into the boat. Purcell dropped his hand to his waist, where reposed a revolver, but he was too late. The hunter's bony, muscular hands closed upon him, he was lifted bodily, and then followed a splash as he struck the water several feet away.

"Keep your place, or you shall follow your comrade!"

The words were sternly spoken in Mike Mulloy's ears, and he turned and saw Waldo Temple at his side. Mulloy would have resented a charge that he was a coward, but, somehow, he didn't feel like riding his high horse any further. He kept silent and he remained motionless until Gaffer Golightly turned upon him.

"Git out o' this boat!"

The hunter's blood was up and his unusually mild eyes had an ominous quiver. Mike beheld, and he meekly arose just as his friend floundered from the water. Those in the boat were rid of both, and Missouri dipped the oars and left shore.

"I'll come over after you, directly," she called to the passengers who had "got left."

But not a word did they answer, and Temple took their silence to be one more to be dreaded than loud words.

"You must not go near them!" he impressively said.

Missouri looked at him with a little surprise and then smiled.

"And why not?"

"Do you not see they mean mischief?"

"Oh! I don't mind that. I carry a good many rough characters over the ferry, but they don't mean half they say when they get to storming, usually; and if they do they don't amount to anything. I'm not afraid of them!"

She made the assertion in a matter-of-fact way, while steadily pulling the boat, and Gaffer nodded approvingly.

"Right you are, Soo. Just let her alone, Temple; she can look out for number one."

The young man felt a little piqued and made no answer, but in spite of the rebuff he could not help watching the girl with admiration. She rowed in a way not to be excelled. In perfect time and with a stroke which barely rippled the water, she drew toward the further shore.

Such a woman was new in Temple's experience and he wondered what was her history. If she was sole mistress of the ferry it looked as though she was alone in Quartz Rock, and it required a business faculty and a bold spirit for a girl to fight her way in the rough West.

But Missouri did it and run a venture which gave her a good living; small as was the toll, the ferry was a paying property.

As they neared the northern shore Temple

saw the second boat rocking by the bank. It was a large, flat-bottomed craft of a nondescript pattern, but well-fitted for the service in which it was engaged.

Two negroes lay prostrate inside and looked so unutterably indolent and lifeless that Temple wondered what possible use they could be to any one. Just then, however, two horsemen rode down to the bank, and as their movements became audible the negroes leaped up like jumping-jacks. Men and horses went on board, the negroes seized the broad oars and pulled away with steady, powerful strokes, having first been instructed by their mistress to bring over Purcell and Mulloy.

Temple would have lingered near the spot to see if there was further trouble—and to see Missouri—but Gaffer bade him follow and started for the village. As they went, he did not fail to ask for information concerning the ferry-girl.

"Now, you've got me," said the hunter. "All I know is what you kin see fur yourself. She come hyar nigh ontar two years ago, with her blackies, an' started ther ferry. 'Tis said she give some sort o' a name, at first, but folks got inter ther habit o' callin' her 'Missouri,' an' she jest dropped ther other an' tuk ter it alone. An' when folks has asked her about her past, she ain't given them no information at all."

"Are the negroes equally reserved?"

"They're ekully in ther dark. She picked 'em up in some border-town whar they was left by ther bu'stin' o' a circus, an' that's all they know 'bout her."

"She seems to be a well-meaning girl."

"Wal-meanin'! Wal, I reckon she are. Ef anybody denies it, jest let me know. I cotton ter her a good bit an' stand ready ter fight her battles. She's ez squar' a gal ez ever crossed ther Mississipp'."

Temple was beginning an answer when Gaffer suddenly nudged his elbow.

"Open yer eyes! Hyar comes Ike Leonard, ther king-pin o' Quartz Rock. He's got his attention on us, an' ez he's amblin' this way, I take it he ain't in good humor. Don't rile ther critter while he goes slow hisself."

Temple looked, and was surprised at the kind of man he saw. Isaac Leonard was fifty years old, but looked much younger, and might easily have passed for a soldier. Standing six feet in his boots, he had an admirable figure, and would have called close attention from any one. He was erect and soldierly in his bearing, and a heavy mustach and goatee somehow added to the impression. Moreover, his face was handsome, strong and impressive, and Temple saw it was by true superiority he had become the recognized "great man" of Quartz Rock.

As they neared him he nodded to the hunter, but kept his gaze on Temple.

"How do you do, Gaffer. I see you have not come alone this time."

His voice was calm and even, but the younger man believed he could detect a trace of irritation.

"No, Mr. Leonard," answered Gaffer, in his serene way; he was not a man to be overawed by any one. "I've brung a young man I'm guidin' around 'mongst ther mount'ns fur sport. His name is Waldo Temple."

Mr. Leonard's gold-headed cane fell to the ground. He stooped and picked it up, and carefully brushed it of dirt. Then he looked at Temple, his face calm and dignified.

"From the East, Mr. Temple?"

"From Illinois, sir. I am going through the West to gratify a passion for hunting and adventure. I shall stop at this village a day or two, and then move northward."

He made his announcement as steadily as though Gaffer had not warned him he might not be allowed there at all, but he was not disposed to acknowledge any man's right to compel him to go or come.

"Well, you will find enough to interest you during that time, I think," Mr. Leonard pleasantly replied. "Quartz Rock is comparatively a young town, but it is far from being a dull one. I have, myself, tried to introduce what amusements I could. Gaffer will show you around."

"Ya-a-as," said Gaffer.

It was a long-drawn reply, for the tall hunter was so surprised at Leonard's unusual urbanity that he could hardly command his speech at all.

"Thank you," Temple answered. "I shall be glad to look over the place. Quartz Rock is so far removed from other towns that it has a peculiar importance."

"Yes, settlers are few in this section. So many hostile Indians are about that it would be extremely risky to try to plant another town. Bounding Bison and his Blackfeet rule with a red hand—everywhere except here. We manage to keep secure by admitting only worthy men to our ranks."

"An excellent plan," said Temple, though he was gaining, rather than losing, suspicion. If Quartz Rock was so exclusive a place as Gaffer claimed, there might be a sting behind this cordiality.

"I suppose the friends you left behind at your old home would be worried now, if they knew

you were in Bounding Bison's country," said Leonard, laughing.

"There is no one there to worry."

"No?"

"No. I may say like the colored man down South, 'When you see Sambo, you see all dar is ob us.' I am a sort of lone tree, Mr. Leonard; utterly without relations. Yet, so far as Bounding Bison goes, I am just as much interested in keeping my scalp out of his clutches as a wife or mother-in-law could be."

"Ha! ha! Mr. Temple, you are quite a wit. I shall have to see you again before you go. Gaffer, I suppose you put up at The Hearthstone?"

"I s'pose so," Gaffer slowly replied.

"I'll call and see you, Mr. Temple. Just now, I am in haste. Good-day!"

And he hurried away, while the new-comers walked on toward the hotel named by Leonard—The Hearthstone.

"Is this your grizzly bear?" Waldo slowly asked.

"Young chap, you kin knock me over with a straw. I'm darned ef I know what ter make on't. What do you think?"

"How am I to know? All I can see is that my reception don't agree with what you led me to expect."

"Wal, look right hyar. Don't forget what I tole ye ter expect. I tole ye Leonard was a tough rooster from A ter Z, an' a man who was never ter be trusted. Jest you b'ar that in mind!"

"Then, what object has he in view?"

"That's somethin' it behooves ye ter look out fur, an' I advise ye ter keep yer eyes open ter ther widest width. Ef ye don't wantar be ketched nappin' play ther weasel."

"But, what in the world can Leonard want of me? We are entire strangers."

"That may be, an' at ther same time he may hev worked ye fur somethin'. When ye see a grizzly sing like a canary, or a rattlesnake play with ther baby, look out!"

Gaffer Golightly delivered the warning with an earnestness which left no doubt of his sincerity, while it was plain he was much in the dark as was Temple.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

ISAAC LEONARD, after leaving the new-comers, made his way at once to his own house, going secretly and entering at the rear as though to avoid observation. Once in the house, he hurried to a front room, where his daughter Agnes sat listlessly reading a book.

"Come to the window!" he said, unceremoniously.

She obeyed, stirred out of her languor by his own unusual energy.

"Do you see those two men about to pass?" he continued.

"Yes."

"Look well to the one on this side, the younger man."

Miss Leonard obeyed, and her father saw a new light appear in her bold, black eyes. She watched until the strangers had passed, but she had eyes only for the younger.

Mentally, she termed him a king among men. He was handsome, graceful, and her ideal of manliness; more than that, he was very different from the men of Quartz Rock.

Isaac waited patiently for her to turn around, but his keen, critical eyes were studying her face constantly. When she did turn he uttered one brief word:

"Well?"

"I have seen him," Miss Leonard answered, studying her father's face in turn, as she would a chess-board.

"What do you think of him?"

Her full, red lips parted, and revealed even, snowy teeth behind them, and yet there was no smile on her face.

"He is like what a king should be," she promptly replied.

"I am glad you think so, for you must make yourself his wife!"

He spoke without the least trace of excitement, but she knew him well enough to be sure he was not jesting, and a stronger light appeared in her black eyes—a light such as is seen in those of a tigress eagerly watching for its prey.

"Bring him in; I am ready!" she at once answered.

"Not so fast, my dear; we must land our fish before we bag him."

"Hasn't he proposed?" she asked, a shadow crossing her face.

"No. On the contrary, he has never seen you. He has but just arrived at Quartz Rock."

"Yet you wish me to marry him?"

"Yes."

"My worthy sire, what fresh scheme is working in your prolific mind?"

"A scheme to give you a husband you will admire, love, honor and obey."

"Obey!" she muttered, half-absently. "That will be a new thing for me, for I have never obeyed even you except when it was to benefit myself. Yet, King Leonard, I, who have held

myself above men, am willing to obey, to be the slave of him who has just passed!"

She made a rare and wonderful picture as, uttering this assertion with subdued passion, she faced her father, with the red lips still parted and the black eyes gleaming like a strong but half-concealed fire.

She was tall for a woman—much above the usual height of her sex—but her form, which was full though not corpulent, was so perfectly proportioned as to make her stature but one of the attributes of queenliness. A magnificent woman she was, so far as personal looks went, for her face was in keeping with her form. It was symmetrical, her complexion was perfection, with its mingling of red and white, and her full red lips and black eyes played their part, as did the abundance of shining black hair above all.

Yet the face was bold and hard, as were the eyes, and a strict observer would have pronounced her unscrupulous. But not a woman of ice. Ah! no; the eyes, the lips, the whole face told a far different story.

Such a woman is capable of Cleopatra-like intensity of love and Cleopatra-like deeds of desperation.

Isaac Leonard was delighted. Knowing the willfulness of his daughter's nature, he had feared she might rankly rebel when his hopes were made known, but he saw that he was to have a more than willing ally.

"Good!" he said. "We will begin our battle at once."

"How?" she asked.

"Waldo Temple—such is his name—must be invited here; we must become his friends, and slowly, steadily, cunningly, you must weave a web about his heart. Win him, and all that money can buy shall be yours."

"Very good, my worthy sire, but I am not to be kept in the dark. Why are you so anxious to win this stranger—or have you known him before?"

"I never saw him until to-day."

"Then why are you so anxious to have him for a son-in-law?"

"Because, like you, I have read the man's mettle, and I clearly see he is the kind of a person to be my assistant now, my successor when I am too old to wield the scepter of power."

The girl looked at him keenly.

"Is this your only reason?"

"Yes," he replied, meeting her gaze unwaveringly.

"Be it so. Bring the stranger here—Waldo Temple—and he shall ultimately marry me, though all the world should stand between us."

The assertion was made in a way fit for a queen of stage-tragedy, but at this point the conversation was interrupted as a servant appeared and announced a caller—Mr. John Purcell, was the name given.

Leonard was willing to see him and our flashily-dressed acquaintance soon entered. He had exchanged his former suit for a dry one since Gaffer flung him in the river, but his face had an extremely ugly look which Isaac at once noticed. Therefore, after the first greetings, he bluntly asked the nature of the trouble.

"I want authority to give a man his last earthly trouble," Purcell said, viciously.

"Ah! Who is the man?"

"Gaffer Golightly."

"Indeed! Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Purcell, but I must decline. Mr. Golightly is—"

"Wait until you hear my story. Mike Mulloy and I were on the further side of the ferry and we signaled for a boat. Missouri came over, and we had taken our places in the craft when that dry bone of a hunter appeared, with another man, and insisted on crossing first. So we were frightened and I had to do the talking. I assured the two ruffians they could not have our places. Upon that, Gaff leaped into the boat, seized me and flung me into the water. Then Mulloy was driven out at a revolver's mouth, and Missouri had to row the men over first. Naturally, I object to this. I am a citizen of Quartz Rock and these men are outsiders. By violence they usurped my place, and I was flung in the water. I object to this, as I said before, and wish leave to put them where they cannot repeat the act."

Miss Leonard had watched and listened, and her face expressed both scorn and anger. Plainly, Purcell did not have her sympathy.

Neither did he have that of Isaac. Purcell was an ally in fair standing, but he did not intend to have either Gaffer or Temple molested. Besides, he read in Jack's face the fact that he was lying.

"It is singular that Missouri, who is usually so self-reliant, was frightened," said Leonard.

"But there were two men against her, you know," explained Purcell.

"Well, didn't she have two men—yourself and Mulloy—to help her?" was the shrewd inquiry.

Purcell's face fell.

"Come, Jack, no tricks on old travelers. Tell me the truth," added the elder man, more commandingly.

The fellow was unexpectedly caught, and he gave up his chosen position without an attempt

to hold it. On the contrary, he told the ferry trouble just as it happened, save that he still stuck to his old lie and claimed he had signaled the boat before Golightly.

"You are a fine strategist!" cried Agnes, scornfully. "Only yesterday I heard you vow by all that was fair and foul that you would win Missouri for your wife."

"So I will!" declared Purcell, with a curse.

"Is this the way you take to do it?"

"I let my hot temper run away with me," said the blackleg, sullenly; "but I have a way for conquering her, if Mr. Leonard will help me."

"You are full of your wants," Leonard observed.

"I see you don't wish Gaffer molested, so I will swallow my chagrin on one condition. I want help with Missouri. She is as pert, saucy and contemptuous as a girl can be, and extreme measures must be taken to subdue her. Now, Mike Mulloy wants the ferry bad, and I propose that we give Soo a chance to marry me and keep the ferry, or to refuse me and lose it to Mulloy."

"Nonsense! I am not going to turn her out," said Leonard, trying to make light of the request.

"What interest have you in her?" Purcell spitefully demanded; his tone bringing a flush to Leonard's face.

"Pardon me, Mr. Purcell, but if I had any 'interest' in her, as you express it, I should not feel call upon to explain. My standpoint is simple, however. Missouri came to Quartz Rock a lonely and unknown girl. With a business eye, she saw what none of my men had seen—that a ferry across the river would pay. The novelty of her proposal and her courage interested me, and I told her to go ahead. She did so, and has built up a good business. Now, sir, though she has never become practically one of us, I so admire her pluck that I will stand by her. She can keep the ferry!"

Agnes heard the verdict indifferently, as she would have listened to that of a mountain sheep caught in a trap; but though Purcell had another iron in the fire, his face showed his bitter dissatisfaction.

"There is one thing more," he said. "Our rules forbid strangers to meddle here, but I want to say that a blind man might have seen that Soo and the companion of Golightly—his name is Temple—fell dead in love with each other at first sight. The girl will be marrying him off-hand, and then we'll have Temple, with his prying Eastern eyes, saddled on us as master of Brown Hand Ferry."

Purcell had seen no evidence to support his theory, but he was playing his cards for all they were worth, and he had chanced to play a trump.

The possibility that the ferry-girl would capture Waldo Temple gave both father and daughter a shock; and with a fresh light in her black eyes the latter made a quick gesture.

"Would Mulloy be likely to manage the ferry well?" Leonard asked, with pretended thoughtfulness.

"He would be the right man in the right place!" Purcell declared.

"Well, I'll look into the matter, and I think you may rely on me to help you. Call again to-morrow."

Purcell understood that he was dismissed and, very fairly satisfied, took his departure.

"Help him?" said Agnes, viciously. "Of course you will! I always hated that bold ferry-girl, and since she has dared to look at Temple she has got to get out of the Brown Hand and out of Quartz Rock."

"She shall, at the least sign that Temple even admires her; rest assured of that," Leonard replied.

And he was more in earnest than his daughter knew, for his specious expressed reason for wishing Waldo Temple to become his son-in-law was but a falsehood; he had another and far more urgent reason for desiring the marriage. He was resolved that Temple should have, within a month, one of two brides—Agnes or Death!

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAP FOR THE ELK RIDER.

"By mightyation! it's goin' ter be a pow-wow, er my name ain't Beriah Brown—Brown without any 'e'!"

The speaker lay on the top of a cliff and looked down into the small canyon below. He was a man of middle age and, in every way, seemed a typical miner, though his face was honest and prepossessing. He was well armed, and, as he lay, hugged a rifle as though it was an old friend.

Twenty Indians had rode into the canyon and, while he watched, dismounted, turned their horses loose and gathered as though for a conference. They were no strangers to him. He was a citizen of Quartz Rock and he knew these men were the Blackfeet that roved all along the foothills and, led by Bounding Bison, a redoubtable chief, dealt out death to all who ventured near, except the chosen people of Quartz Rock.

More than this, he easily recognized Bounding Bison, a stout middle-aged ruffian whose

naturally cruel face was seamed by the white scar of an old wound.

"You durned heathen!" muttered the miner, looking down. "It would just give me solid chunks o' mirth ter put a lump o' lead inter ye, an' it would be a mighty good thing fur ther foothills. But I s'pose I'll hev ter hold my peace while I put up at Quartz Rock, though sech things ain't ter ther taste o' Beriah Brown—Brown, without any 'e'!"

For the honest miner believed that Bounding Bison was in the pay of Isaac Leonard and stationed in the foothills to keep other people out; to give the men of Quartz Rock a chance to reap all the golden harvest of river-bed and quartz-rock in that vicinity.

The Blackfeet gathered in a circle and Bounding Bison began to speak. Beriah leaned far over the edge of the rocks—further than was safe—and tried to hear his words, but it was in vain. At that distance only a faint murmur could be distinguished. Such being the case he was tempted to try and get nearer, but the cliff was perpendicular at that point, a wide detour would be necessary to descend, and when once down there was little hope of getting near enough to hear anything without being discovered.

So the miner kept his place and watched.

For half an hour the consultation went on, and with an earnestness unusual to Indians, and then the entire band arose, mounted and rode away down the canyon.

Beriah followed at the top.

The Blackfeet went nearly half a mile and then halted where the canyon made a curve. Once more they dismounted, and then followed a strange scene. Some of the warriors seized the boulders which were scattered about and bore them to a common point; others cut small pine trees from the wooded bank a hundred yards below and dragged them to the same place; while a third section began to form these two elements into a straight line reaching from side to side of the canyon.

"Looks like a wall," muttered Beriah, "but what in mightyation is it fur?"

"Me tell you!"

A quiet voice uttered the words near his elbow and he wheeled like a flash; then he grasped his knife as he saw an Indian youth standing before him. But the new-comer put out his hand quickly with the palm foremost.

"We bes' no fight; we friends," he said, quietly, in broken English.

"Mebbe we be, but it's news ter me ef I'm ther friend o' any Blackfoot. Ef you was a man I'd sail inter you like a norther, but bein' a boyee—"

The Indian stopped him with a gesture.

"Do I look like a Blackfoot?" he asked, his broken English giving place to an almost perfect utterance.

"I reckon you've got mixed blood, fur yer featur's are reg'lar, but ther red seems ter free-dominate."

"Wal! is the white gold-digger blind? His friend, whom the red-men call Long Rifle is not so blind. He can tell a Pawnee from a Blackfoot."

"Are you a Pawnee?"

"I have spoken."

"I heerd yer toot yer horn. Wal, that ain't sayin' that you ain't one of Boundin' Bison's gang."

"Does the eagle look like the vulture? I am a Pawnee and I hate the Blackfeet. They know me well, but they would kill me if they could. Mountain Cat is no friend of theirs."

"By which I s'pose your name is Mount'in Cat, though ye go all 'round Robin Hood's barn ter say it. Wal, I'm glad ef you ain't one o' that murderin' gang. Mebbe you will tell me what they're buildin' ther wall fur, sence u said you could."

"They hope to trap the Elk Rider."

"Hey! How can a speerit be trapped?"

"Bounding Bison is not sure the Elk Rider is a spirit, though all his warriors think so. He intends to test the matter."

"Does, eh? Wal, I s'pose Lightnin' Bolt bez agreed ter walk right inter ther trap, ain't he?"

Beriah spoke with sarcastic emphasis.

"The Blackfoot hopes to lure him in."

"How did you find this out?"

"Wal! when the Blackfeet camped in the canyon above, Red Shoulder watched them from the top of the cliff, but Mountain Cat crawled close and listened to their words."

Beriah surveyed his companion critically before speaking further. In years the Pawnee was not over twenty and he was slenderly built, but his arms were well-rounded, his chest prominent and his shoulders and hips well developed. Clearly, he would make no mean opponent, while the expression of his face was intelligent and lofty, indicating a strong nature and natural bravery. The regularity of his features, too, was proof that white blood flowed in his veins.

"Why do ye tell this ter me?" Beriah finally asked.

"Because, like me, you hate the Blackfeet."

"Why do you hate 'em?"

The Pawnee made a deprecating gesture.

"Be content to know I hate them. I have

journeyed far from my own country to meet and harass them, and a Pawnee never forgets. You are from the town by the walled river, but you know what Bounding Bison is."

"Ther king-pin o' Quartz Rock loves ther Bison."

"The vulture mates with the vulture," said Mountain Cat, with a sweeping gesture.

"Then you don't feel friendly to'arts Isaac Leonard?"

The calm face of the youth darkened and a scowl made him look dark and forbidding.

"Me take him scalp bime-bye, some day!" he said, breaking into broken English.

"Sho! You're on a ginerel vendetta, ain't ye? Do ye 'spect ter wipe out ev'ry body in ther foothills?"

The Pawnee laid his hand lightly on Beriah's arm.

"Look!" he said, in a deep voice. "I am Mountain Cat, a warrior from the rising sun, but do I tell you I am your enemy, Red Shoulder? Go ask Long Rifle, whom you call Goelity, if he knows the Pawnee? I am his friend, and as I know you to be an honest man, I am yours. But the White Pine and Bounding Bison are dogs and I'll take their scalps."

"Mightyation, I'm all mixed up with your durned amphibious an' met-before-ical language. I'm Red Shoulder, 'cause I wear a red shirt, an' Gaffer Golightly is Long Rifle, 'cause he kerries that old shootin'-iron; but I'm durned ef I know who White Pine is."

"You call him Isaac Leonard."

"Why in thunder didn't you say so, then? Wal, it seems you hev a grudge ag'in' Leonard, Boundin' Bison an' ther Blackfeet, an' you're on a hot-hunt ter wipe 'em out. All right, my boyee; wade in. I don't care a durn so long ez Beriah Brown—Brown without any 'e'—holds tergether. An', furthermore, sence you don't want ter tell why you hate ther crowd, all right. Is that satisfactory?"

"Ugh! Much good; Red Shoulder my brother!"

"Possibly I be, but as my parients died thirty year ago I can't see it. Hows'ever, I ain't ther man ter refuse a friendly offer. Shake onc't, an' then let's take a look at ther Blackfeet. Ketch ther Elk Rider? Bah! they might ez wal try ter lasso a cloud!"

Both men looked over the cliff to the canyon below. The men were busy as before, but the wall had arisen rapidly. It was certainly strong enough to stop any human rider, whether he rode an elk or a horse. Beriah noticed a gap in the center and asked the Pawnee what it meant. The answer was that it was for the escape of the man who was to lure Lightning Bolt into the trap. When he had passed through a gate would be dropped and the mountain demon would be where the Blackfeet could fall on him in a body.

Then, unless he was a spirit, he would probably fall before their attack.

"But he is a speerit," said Beriah, stubbornly.

"How does my brother know?"

"Know? Hain't all Montana fired at him? Wal, I guess, an' Gaff Golightly among them, an' he don't never miss; Gaff don't."

"Men are often deceived."

"Don't ye think he's a speerit?"

"I think not; me not sure. White men who talk much say dere no spirits; Injuns say dere is. Me not know who to b'lieve. White man orter know; he read much, study, think; he ought be wise."

"So had his grandmother!" said Beriah, with a snort of such disdain and strength that Mountain Cat uttered a caution. "I say thar be speerits, an' no wise men can't fly in ther face o' ther proof I kin produce ef—"

"Sh!"

Again the Pawnee cautioned him, and Beriah saw him grasp his knife and bend one leg as though for a spring, his eyes suddenly gleaming like coals.

"Sh!"

Mountain Cat repeated the caution, and then the miner heard a soft footfall beyond them. He drew his own knife and prepared for action; but despite the fact that the Pawnee was almost a boy, he instinctively waited for him to take the lead.

Suddenly the youth bounded to his feet, his movement as agile as that of a deer, and Beriah heard a grunt and a collision. He bounded up himself. Just beyond him was a painted Blackfoot warrior; but he was in the grasp of Mountain Cat, and the alarming yell he would have sounded was kept back by the pressure of the Pawnee's strong hand.

CHAPTER VI.

A WILD FIGHT IN THE CANYON.

BERIAH sprung forward to lend his aid, but it was not needed. Mountain Cat's arm shot forward, the Blackfoot gave a convulsive leap, and then his enemy lowered him to the ground and he lay still. The victor calmly wiped his knife-blade.

"Bounding Bison bes' keep his men-squaws at home," said the Pawnee, quietly.

"I should remark! You strike a strong blow,

young feller; but you never hit a better object. I know this carcass. He was Windfoot, so called, an' a heathen from ther ground up. I s'pose you'll raise his ha'r."

Mountain Cat made a quick gesture.

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Never do; leave that to Blackfoot; Pawnee no butcher!"

"Oh! Wal, I'm glad on't; but I reckon thar's them among yer race that ain't so sentimental. Hows'ever—"

"We bes' dig grave; get warrior out ob sight. Mebbe bimeby, fore long, other Blackfeet look for dis one. Dey bes' not find him."

"Thar's nuggets o' hoss-sense in way you say, an' we will proceed ter inter ther varmint. It's a good day fur ther foothills when you slew him."

They found a recess among the rocks where a very little work made a grave. In that the Blackfoot was laid, covered over and left to his last sleep. By that time Beriah and Mountain Cat had become better acquainted and the miner began to take a fancy to him. It was one recommendation that he hated Bounding Bison's band, and there was something in his manner which told Beriah he was a good fellow, in his way, and would make a good friend.

Really, he was the miner's superior in intellect and education. At times he broke into "pigeon English," but as a rule he spoke the language well and ornamented it with Indian-like figures of speech. The latter fact showed him to be of more than ordinary rank and intelligence, for the majority of border Indians have forsaken the old-time figurative language of their race for the white man's whisky bottle and the white man's oaths.

Mountain Cat evidently had temptation to adopt the vices of both races, for it was clear he had a good deal of white blood in his veins. Yet, he was no pale-face in paint; the dusky color of his cheeks was his birthright and would remain with him until Mother Earth received his remains.

Beriah tried to learn more about him, but he revealed but little. Among the Pawnees he had been called Prairie Cat, but when he struck the foothills he very appropriately changed his name to Mountain Cat. He acknowledged that he had journeyed from the lodges of his own people because he hated Isaac Leonard, Bounding Bison and the Blackfeet, but why he hated them he would not state.

"Me tell you dis, as friend," he explained. "Long Rifle say you good man. If so be you go tell White Pine 'bout me; say to to him, too, Mountain Cat not fear him."

"When you ketch me tellin' tales ter Ike Leonard you jest raise yer bugle an' let me know it," Beriah answered; "I don't like ther skunk!"

They watched while the Indians finished their work in the canyon below. A wall had been built which all agreed only a spirit could go through or over, and the gateway left for the escape of their decoy was the only means of passage. At a moment's notice the gate could be dropped and the wall made solid.

By the time it was done twilight was falling. The red-men ate their supper on the north side of the wall. At the top of the cliff the two spies waited and watched, eating from the dried meat Mountain Cat had in his pouch.

Beriah had little faith in the scheme of the Blackfeet. Lightning Bolt seemed to be an *ignis fatuus*. No living creature was able to calculate on his whereabouts. Only when the "Giant Elk" and his rider burst forth from a mountain gulch into sight could any one say, with certainty, "Lightning Bolt is near!"

So the miner had little faith that the strange being would be decoyed into the trap. The Pawnee expressed no opinion.

After dark there was a stir in the gulch and Mountain Cat thought it probable the Blackfeet were going after their foe. All this would have seemed absurd to Beriah had he not suddenly suspected that Lightning Bolt had been discovered resting near.

"We bes' go down into canyon if wanten ter see what happens," said the young Indian, finally. "Can't see from here, canyon so dark."

For a moment Beriah hesitated. Once below they would be at the mercy of the Indians if discovered. Was it safe to believe the Mountain Cat was not leading him into an ambush?

He abandoned the suspicion and they went down softly. To do this they were obliged to go a hundred yards down the cliff, in order to find a sloping place; and then they crept back toward the barricade, keeping in the darkest shadows.

When as near as prudent they paused in a niche. The Mountain Cat lay flat upon the ground and, never stirring, watched the Blackfeet. Beriah was no Indian-fighter. He had never seen the West until he came there, six years before, to dig gold, and since he came had done little else. He found it impossible to assume his companion's stolidity, but he did his best.

At times, as he watched the savages and re-

membered their merciless character, he wished himself out of the canyon, but looking at the Pawnee, who lay like a detached fragment of the cliff, he was too proud to retreat.

Suddenly the young Indian moved, grasped Beriah's arm and pressed it silently. He was understood. The miner listened intently. From down the canyon the sound of galloping hoofs as heard and there was a stir among the Indians.

Beriah experienced a cold chill. If Lightning Bolt was really coming he might meet a worse foe than the Blackfeet.

Lying so close to the ground he was able to see quite clearly and, in the distance, he soon discerned an Indian pony flying toward them at full speed. His rider was invisible, but it was easy to comprehend that he was lying flat upon his back, or side.

Then, behind the first, another dark spot appeared, but one larger than the first. Was it a ridden horse? The question was superfluous; his own eyes answered it.

Looking keenly he distinguished the never-to-be-forgotten forms of the Giant Elk and his strange rider. The animal was following the horse and seemed to keep almost perfect time, while Lightning Bolt sat erect in his place, his hands down, his head never turning, but riding straight on into the Indians' trap as a dummy might ride.

Beriah felt his flesh creep. He had no doubt but the Elk Rider was Old Nick let loose, and he would gladly have faced all the Blackfeet to escape from the canyon and from the strange being on the elk.

Nearer and nearer they came. The decoy red-skin hung from his horse so as to expose as little as was possible of his valuable person, but he was probably the worst frightened man in Montana.

But, despite that, he was leading Lightning Bolt into the trap; the ruse seemed working admirably.

There was no evidence that the Elk Rider suspected anything, nor did he seem to see the barricade. And when the decoy shot through the narrow opening and the gate dropped down, nothing remained to be done except to slaughter the man or spirit, who was the terror of the Blackfeet.

They arose from their ambush with the wildest of yells, and dashed toward him, each warrior trying to conquer his fears, and believing him a human being, to slay him; but Lightning Bolt made no start of surprise, and as the Giant Elk, never slackening his speed, came around in a half-circle with beautiful regularity, the dreaded pair swept toward the Indians, who had hoped to see them flee.

"Now! now!" exclaimed Mountain Cat, eagerly. "Watch, Red Shoulder, watch!"

"I can't help watchin'!" groaned Beriah. "I wish I could, fur— Good Lord!"

He broke off as the Elk Rider's arm arose above his head, and then shot forward, while from his hand went a round, blazing ball—a red missile of fire which sent out sparks, and left a tail like that of a comet behind it.

Some of the Blackfeet had seen the sight before, and the rush was turned to a retreat; they wheeled and ran upon each other in their alarm.

Vain attempt! The ball of fire dropped into their midst, and with a dull, sodden sound, like the bursting of a rocket as heard from mid-air, it blew into scores of pieces, and cries of pain arose from the savages.

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" groaned Beriah.

Even Mountain Cat was silenced and awed. With all his efforts to think intelligently, this scene was too much for him; he was ready to believe with the Blackfeet that [the Evil Spirit was among them.

But Lightning Bolt was not yet done. While the Giant Elk kept up his circle, which did not extend to the fleeing Indians, his rider sent two more missiles flying among them, each with the same result as its predecessor; and no man in the canyon aspired to molest the destroyer further.

Still in time, never faster, never slower, wholly unmoved, the elk kept around the circle, and his master sat like a statue; then, when their faces were once more toward the barricade, the buck sped forward in a straight line, and, with a magnificent bound, cleaving the air like a veritable phantom steed, disappeared over the wall so laboriously built to stop him, while Lightning Bolt, with a wild yell of derision, sent a parting grenade among the terrified red-skins.

He had made a leap no beholder had ever seen elk take before.

He was gone and there was no one to pursue. There were dead Indians on the west side of the canyon, and those who survived were needed to care for them. Besides, they would not have followed the Elk Rider for all Montana. They had decided upon his nature; not one of them doubted but he was the Evil Spirit come to scourge and destroy them.

And what of Mountain Cat and Beriah Brown?

"Come!" said the latter, shivering. "Let us git outer hyar. I've see'd ther devil, hisself, an' I don't want another look!"

CHAPTER VII.

TEMPLE MEETS AGNES LEONARD.

GAFFER GOLIGHTLY and his friend went at once to "The Hearthstone," as the sole hotel of the town was called. There was a grim face-tiousness about calling it a hotel, anyway, since travelers only came to Quartz Rock at risk of their lives, and rarely at all; it was rather a resort for the people of the village, where they could drink and play cards. But drunkenness and lavish risking of money were frowned upon by Isaac Leonard, and the place was always orderly and cosey.

The hunter was welcomed by the host, Tobias Wimple, who was not a hard-hearted man, and this, together with the meeting with Leonard, would have led Temple to think Gaffer had been romancing about Quartz Rock had he not had the fullest faith in him.

On his own part, Gaffer was far from being at ease, and when they were alone he advised a prompt departure from the town.

"No!" said Temple, with quiet firmness. "I am not in the habit of being driven out of any town, and besides, if Isaac Leonard has designs on me, as you suspect, I want to see his purpose develop."

"Ef you'd seen as many o' his purposes develop as I have, you wouldn't hanker," Gaffer retorted.

"But you say he's on a new tack now."

"So he is."

"Then perhaps he wants to adopt me."

"Mebbe he does, in his way!"

"You won't be convinced, I see."

"Not that Ike Leonard has any good in him. That's a dangerous speech ter make in Quartz Rock, but I reckon thar ain't any listeners."

"It may be rash, but I intend to face the music," said Temple, thoughtfully. "I have a new reason for wanting to remain in Quartz Rock."

"What's that?"

"To see Missouri, the ferry-girl."

Gaffer looked up with startling quickness.

"What d'ye want to see her for?"

"Because I admire the girl. She is of a species new to me. Pretty, charming and self-reliant, she is a jewel!"

"Ef you think that, you had better go away mighty quick!"

"Why so?"

"Because Missouri ain't ter be looked at lightly while Gaffer Golightly treads Montana's ile."

Temple looked bewildered, then astonished, and, last of all, a sober look crossed his face.

"I am sorry you think so poorly of me, Gaffer. Heaven knows I would not have the girl feel one moment's pain for anything I might do; and I would not look at her any more 'lightly' than I would at the daughter of a king."

His manner and tone convinced his honest friend, who put out his hand quickly.

"I ax yer pardon, my boy; I r'a'ly do. I might have knowed you wasn't that kind. That yet that shake makes it all right. Now, I'll meet ye on yer own ground. Soo is a pretty gal, an' a good an' sensible one, too; an' I'd ax ye ter go with me an' see her, only she ain't used ter a handsome young chap like you, an' she might take a real fancy ter you which you couldn't return. Remember she is only a ferry-girl."

"That goes for nothing. I care not whether a woman or man is rich or poor. I look at the heart, if I can, not at the hands to see whether they are fair or toll-hardened."

Mr. Golightly proposed that they shake hands again, and then promised to take his friend to see Missouri soon.

An hour later Isaac Leonard was announced. He came in briskly, greeted both men, and then sat down for a social talk. Conversation took a turn Gaffer could not follow, and he dropped out and feigned sleep that he might listen under more favorable circumstances. It was some time before Leonard approached the subject nearest his mind.

"It is pleasant to meet an educated man now and then," he said; "for up in this wild Montana land there are few people of any kind, much less educated ones. Yet, remote as we are, I have managed to build a good home and furnish it fairly. If you will go over to my house I will show you how I live."

Golightly groaned inwardly, but Temple did not hesitate.

"I shall be pleased to go," he said promptly.

They went, and thus it was that, half an hour later, Temple found himself bowing politely at the introduction.

"Mr. Temple, my daughter, Miss Leonard!"

The young man caught his breath quickly, for, though accustomed to all grades of society, he was not prepared for such dazzling beauty as burst upon him.

Agnes had been given time for preparation, and she had made the most of it. She was richly and becomingly dressed; her excellent taste had kept her from indulging in display which, certainly, was not needed to set off her beauty.

The visitor speedily recovered his wits and,

with her hand resting in his, made some appropriate remark. Then the three sat down together.

The scene was enough to have made a weaker man forget all distrust; kindly entertained, Temple might almost have fancied he was the guest of the highest dignity in the land; but he was not one to lose his head, and when honeyed words were sounded in his ears, he did not forget Gaffer and his homely warning.

Father and daughter played their parts admirably. Kind, hospitable, genial, and social, they never went too far, and there was no external evidence that they were doing more than to entertain pleasantly a stranger cast temporarily among them.

Both had the ability to please in that degree which a lifetime of art could not supply; it was a natural and, to others, dangerous gift.

Miss Leonard never before so exerted herself to please. Each moment increased her ambition to win Waldo Temple; she had loved him from the first, and each breath she drew seemed to strengthen the passion. And, with her, love was a river of flowing lava which envelops all in its path, and either makes what it seeks a part of itself, or leaves it a scorched and blackened ruin in its passage.

But no warning beacon was displayed to caution those she met. Looking at the gloriously lovely face, the whole seemed told. Divinely beautiful, she could only awaken admiration while she smiled so graciously. If the tide changed—Well, Waldo Temple would see the result, if it *did* change!

In the midst of their conversation a servant announced that a visitor desired to see Mr. Leonard on business. The latter was very sorry, but if Mr. Temple would wait for him he would soon return. Of course, Mr. Temple agreed to wait.

Then Leonard went out of the room, closed the door, and stopping there, applied his ear to the key-hole.

The unwelcome business visitor was but a myth.

"I suppose, Mr. Temple," Agnes was saying, "you have already decided that our little town is the dreariest place you ever saw."

"By no means," the young man answered. "I am not one to be bound up in the shams and allurements of the fashionable world, and I could enjoy myself on the very top of the Rockies—if it wasn't too cold. But you, Miss Leonard—I believe it is natural for ladies to desire society."

"I can say, like you, that I can forego the pleasures of the fashionable world, but Quartz Rock's great failing is a dearth of educated people. Except when some visitor happens along, I rarely see any one who can talk of anything except mines and hunting."

"I wonder your village is even in existence. What protects it from the Blackfeet?"

"Father says they are not really brave and dare not attack us because we are so many."

"But what of the Elk Rider?" Temple asked, smiling.

Miss Leonard shivered.

"Do not mention that fearful creature! He is the nightmare of my life. I never step outside the town without looking for him, in fear. Do you believe he is a spirit?"

"Certainly not. He is a man, but one with an insane thirst for slaying, I should say."

Agnes clapped her hands lightly.

"I am glad to find one who thinks like me. All Quartz Rock, except my father, solemnly assure me Lightning Bolt is a supernatural creature. The Indians call him the Evil Spirit; white men say he is 'Old Nick,' himself. I am glad you don't think so."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Mercy! no; I hope not."

"I trust he is not a slayer of women?"

"Who can tell? One like him is capable of anything. But let us change the subject. I am not a coward, I hope, but thoughts of the Elk Rider make me shiver. Have you seen much of Quartz Rock?"

"Nothing, as I may say."

"If you will accept so poor a guide, I will go around with you to-morrow; father is so busy one can't depend on him."

"I shall be pleased to accept your offer, though we shall quarrel at the start if you call yourself a 'poor guide.'"

Not being aware that this remark was a deliberately uttered test, Agnes's black eyes glittered with ill-concealed pleasure.

"I am only a woman," she replied.

"Only a woman" is an expression which always comprehends a vast deal, and in this case surpasses the average, if you will allow the remark," he said, gravely. "My first experience at Quartz Rock was with a woman. We crossed the ferry kept by the girl known by the strange name of 'Missouri.'"

"Mercy! do not mention her!" said Miss Leonard, with a shiver.

"No?"

"Only among her chosen friends. She is not one I care to know. But, let us change the subject."

It was changed and, to use a military expression, Miss Leonard brought her guns to bear upon the visitor in such a strategic way that,

had he not been forewarned, the walls of his castle would have been falling around him and he unaware of the fact.

The spy outside listened in delight. He had never seen his daughter more brilliant and shrewd, though covering art with art, and he felt sure Waldo Temple was in the trap.

"She will win the battle!" he muttered, rubbing his hands together. "She must win. My future and hers depend on it. She must become Temple's wife!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MISTRESS OF BROWN HAND FERRY.

WHEN Waldo Temple left the house his late entertainers met in high glee, and Isaac shook the hand of his daughter most warmly. Unless signs were very deceptive their fish was fairly hooked, and it only remained to land him and convey him to the matrimonial market.

Their interview was short, for Leonard really had business elsewhere, then, and he went out and left Agnes alone.

She improved the first absence to survey herself in the mirror. This was nothing new for her, but with affairs on the new footing she was more than ever anxious to look well. It would have been a captious person who could have found fault with her personal appearance. Truly, she was magnificently beautiful—and she knew it.

She was still passing before the mirror when a servant announced Mr. John Purcell. Agnes frowned. The flashy man was the enemy of Temple and, as such, was not welcome to the house. Yet, he was a useful man to her father and had to be received.

He came in quickly, looking about the room.

"Where is Mr. Leonard?" he asked.

"Away on business," she coolly answered.

"That's bad," he said, curtly. "If he were here I could furnish proof of what I said."

"What did you say?"

"Why, that Temple and the ferry-girl, Missouri, had struck up a love affair."

Miss Leonard started to her feet.

"Do you mean to say you now have proof?"

"Certainly, I do. He has just gone to the ferry, and she has taken him over in her boat. At this time of night! Bah! it is too transparent. Nobody has occasion to go south on the river after dark, and it is clear they have simply gone out for a ride. Of course they don't want to whisper love when the negroes are around, but on the lonely ferry they can float and talk like two lovers in a Venetian gondola."

Purcell was not talking at random. Miss Leonard had betrayed herself, at the first, and his eyes were keen enough to see it; his mind astute enough to analyze her sudden emotion. Consequently, he made the matter strong, and played on the chords of her jealousy, knowing the result as well as though he played upon a violin.

She caught his arm with a force of which she seemed incapable.

"Prove this!" she said, sibilantly.

"That is easily done. Come with me to the ferry; we will await their return, and you shall see for yourself."

"Wait until I clothe myself in black."

She glided away at the last word, and Mr. Purcell winked exultantly at vacancy.

"Good!" he said; "there's a light in the window for thee, brother. Mike Mulloy wants the Brown Hand Ferry; I want the ferry's mistress; Miss Leonard wants Temple. The pot begins to boil. We will humor Mulloy, and get him to go for the ferry-right, red-hot, and I will say to pretty Missouri, 'Marry me or lose the Brown Hand!' She will marry me, and we will keep the ferry; and in the future she can still paddle our own canoe, and earn golden coins to keep me in pocket-money. As for Miss Leonard and Mulloy, the former may win Temple, if she can; but my esteemed friend, Mulloy, is but a cat's-paw, and when I win Missouri he can't have the ferry, by any means. On the contrary, Michael must go!"

Agnes returned, dressed all in black and deeply veiled, and the pair left the house and hurried toward the ferry.

It was a sudden whim which took Waldo Temple there, but all the while he was with Agnes, and admiring her skill as a man-trapper, he was thinking of Missouri; and when he left the house he suddenly resolved to go to the Brown Hand.

He went, and on the way framed an excuse for intruding on the mistress of the place.

Missouri was still at her post, for though people seldom went over the river from the village after dark, it was usual for those who mined on the other side to return so stragglingly that she never left her post until about nine o'clock. And one who lingered later than that could have a choice between swimming or remaining on the south side all night.

As Temple advanced he saw the twin lights which marked each approach to the ferry, and for a moment he hesitated. His intended course was open to criticism, but as he meant well he summoned fresh courage and pushed ahead.

Both boats were lying at the bank and, as

usual, the negroes seemed sound asleep in theirs. Missouri was wide awake enough, and she nodded as she saw and recognized her visitor.

"Good-evening," he said, pleasantly. "I would like to cross, if you are still in business."

"The ferry is always running when any of us are here. Step in! Your stay in Quartz Rock has not been a long one."

She spoke as though she supposed he was going away, alarmed by the reputation of this peculiar Montana town.

"It will be longer before I leave for good," he quietly replied. "I intend to make quite a stop at Quartz Rock; the town and its people interest me."

He had entered the boat and she dipped her oars and pulled away from the bank.

"Have you told your friend, Gaffer Golightly, as much?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"That I had better turn my back on Quartz Rock and never be seen here again."

"And do you intend to remain in the face of this warning?"

"Yes. Montana is free to all, isn't it?"

The girl hesitated for a moment. He could not see her face, but her voice was still graver as she replied:

"Ask Gaffer!"

"He has given me ample warning. Pardon me, but will you let the boat drift? I am in no haste, and I wish to compare your opinion with that of Gaffer."

"If you have business across the ferry you had better not delay. We leave here at nine, and after that there is no way of crossing except by swimming."

Her advice was not a rebuff and he could not be offended.

"My business can soon be finished, so we will go and, afterward, I will return with you. I think I must have dropped a pocket-knife on the ledge from which Gaffer signaled you. Is the lantern movable?"

"Oh! yes; it is there to be used as a signal. When any one wishes to cross they swing the lantern in a half-circle. Use it for your search."

The boat touched the bank, Temple leaped ashore, took the lantern and went to the top of the ledge. Once there he made a show of searching for the knife which, all the while, was safe in his pocket, and then, with an unspoken hope that his well-meant artifice would not be recorded against him as a sin, returned to where Missouri awaited him.

"Quite successful!" he said, as he entered the boat. "And now, Miss Missouri, let us talk of Quartz Rock, if you please. It is said to be a dangerous place in which to live. Yet, you are here, with no actual protector, and seem to be getting along well."

"My position is a somewhat anomalous one. I am secure—I speak frankly, believing you Gaffer's friend—because the ferry has become a necessary thing to Quartz Rock, and because the men really admire what they call my courage. No one ever thought of a ferry-line before I came. I saw that if ever mining was done on the south side of the river it would be a profitable business. Above and below the pool, where the water races down through the canyons, no man can cross alive. The pool is the only means of passage unless one makes a wide detour, and here the water is from eight to twelve feet deep. I established the ferry, all worked as I hoped, and, to-day, I have a fair business. My boats are deemed indispensable by the miners who cross the river, so I am left alone and well used, though not one of the inner circle at Quartz Rock. Such, in brief, is my position. I have spoken frankly, because you are Gaffer's friend, and to show you that your future in the town must not be judged by mine. Listen to what Gaffer says!"

"And leave Quartz Rock?"

"Well, you know better what he says than I do."

"I see you have a slight hesitation about speaking plainly. You need have none. I am not one to repeat what I hear said, and I wish you would use frankness, as you would do with Gaffer. Here is a town in the wilds of Montana, far from any other. It is not a secret town; it is talked of hundreds of miles away; even the Eastern papers have heard of it and made items on it. What do they say? That it is in a wild, desolate and dangerous place, with Blackfoot Indians hovering all about it, waiting to kill and scalp stragglers. As a result, few people venture here. Am I right, so far?"

"So far as I know—yes."

"Very well; what are the facts? It is said by a few who ought to know that all these terrors are manufactured to keep outsiders away; that Bounding Bison and his Blackfeet are here in the pay of Leonard, to scare off possible new settlers."

"Knowing all this, you ought to be wise enough to flee while you can," Missouri argued.

"Perhaps I had, but I am not. I trust I am not strictly reckless, but I mean to quietly defy the bugbears of Quartz Rock. Perhaps I can take root, as you have done."

"You can doubtless join the colony."

"I prefer independence. You are not one of them; I do not wish to be one of them."

"In that case, I foresee trouble for you."

"Perhaps I can make friends. May I count on you as one?" he laughingly asked.

"At a distance, yes; while you remain at Quartz Rock, no. I cannot afford to endanger my position."

She spoke kindly, but firmly.

"I did not think of that," he answered, quickly, crushing back his pique. "You are right; I must not subject you to danger. Until my position is established in town I must not be known as your friend. After that, I trust you will not bar me out."

Missouri did not answer at once, and she forgot to give her right oar the gentle turn which had kept the boat from drifting.

What passed in her mind Temple vainly wished to know. If he had taken a fancy to her at first, the present interview had deepened the impression. She was a new experience to him. Beauty, grace, refinement and intelligence, were mingled with sagacity, self-reliance, a practical mind and a practical business pursuit.

Truly, she was one woman in a thousand.

CHAPTER IX.

A JEALOUS WOMAN'S VOW.

WHILE Temple and Missouri thus talked, they were unaware that they had an auditor, and as no other boat was on the pool, there seemed to be no good reason why they should fear one. Yet one there was, for a man was floating in the water with the ease of a fish, only his face above the surface.

There was little fear of discovery, for the face was of a darkness almost equal to that of the water and the night. That it was that of an Indian, a close survey would have shown, while those who knew him well, would have recognized the Mountain Cat, from the land of the Pawnees.

The young people in the boat were unaware of the presence of the spy, and Temple eagerly waited for an answer to his last question.

The ferry-girl thought well before she answered, and then in a steady voice, replied:

"If you are in earnest, when asking to be my friend, I would advise you not to think of it further. It can be no honor to you to know Missouri, the keeper of the ferry. Wait! hear me through. Neither honor or pleasure can result to you, and while I am thus situated I must deny myself all friends except my honest negroes. Some time I may leave Quartz Rock, for I do not intend to be a perpetual hermit; but, until then, I must keep by myself. I thank you for your kind words, but our paths lie in different directions."

There was no more to be said. Their acquaintance was of such briefness that it would not do to insist upon the point. As Gaffer's friend, she had used him kindly, but it seemed she had no personal interest in him, and to try to force his company upon her would be to lose what favor he had gained. Still, he resolved that they should meet again, as though by chance, and it might be she would yet change her mind.

So he accepted the situation with as good grace as was possible, and she resumed rowing and sent the boat toward the northern shore. When she did so the lurking Pawnee disappeared beneath the water.

Missouri landed her passenger and he at once left the ferry and moved toward the hotel.

Agnes Leonard and Jack Purcell were watching from a secure hiding-place among the rocks, and the astute blackleg saw that the bosom of his companion heaved from suppressed passion.

"Have I proved my assertion?" he quietly asked.

"Yes," said the jealous woman, sibilantly.

"All is as you said."

"You have seen that it took them half an hour to cross the river. The fact proves the rest. Only lovers would dally in such a way, and this romantic night-meeting—"

"Say no more," Agnes interrupted. "The proof is ample. To-day you asked for leave to menace the girl by threatening to take the ferry away from her. I will speak for my father and agree to your proposal. Let Mike Mulloy appear as a claimant for the place, and then push your own suit with the girl. If she will marry you, she may keep the ferry. If not, it goes to Mulloy, and this shameless creature shall leave Quartz Rock."

Purcell was not disposed to resent the epithet applied to the woman he aspired to marry.

"Enough! I'll take your word for it. When does the campaign begin?"

"At once. How it is to be done shall be settled between you and father. Come to the house early in the morning and the matter shall be discussed. This is enough for now. Good-night!"

She turned and hurried away in the darkness. Purcell, left alone, laughed softly to himself.

"Bravo!" he muttered. "The case is far better outlined than I dared hope. I did not expect such an ally, but my fine lady, who has always scorned me, is so desperately in love with Temple that she will do anything to win him. I

thought his call at their request to-day had a meaning. Ha! Jack Purcell, my boy, with such a backing, you cannot fail to succeed!"

And the plotter went to find Mike Mulloy and tell him to prepare for the race.

In the mean while Agnes Leonard went home and, throwing off her outer garments, revealed a face convulsed with passion. She stamped angrily on the floor.

"I could kill her!" she exclaimed. "How dare she look at the man I have chosen for a husband?—she, a beggarly girl who rows a boat to earn her daily bread! And Temple? He has proved how weak are all men, but I will save him from his folly. The ferry-girl shall be prevented from marrying him, even though I drive my knife to her heart to do it. I swear it!"

She looked capable of anything as she stood there with a crimson flush in her face, her black eyes glittering and her red lips parted and revealing teeth which, somehow, seemed then like those of a tigress about to spring on its prey.

Unconscious of the storm arising around him, Temple went to "The Hearthstone." He found Gaffer there, but not alone. A strongly-built man in a red shirt was earnestly talking with him.

"Mr. Temple, Mr. Brown," said the hunter.

"Brown without any 'e,'" explained the stout man, as he gave his hand.

"Mine is Temple, with an 'e,' but that don't prevent our being good friends," said Waldo, smiling; for the broad face of Beriah Brown bore Nature's own stamp of honesty.

"He's jest been tellin' me a story that will interest you," added Golightly.

"Ah! what was it?"

"He's see'd Lightning Bolt in his most cantankerous mood."

"To-day?"

"This evenin'," replied Beriah. "Ther critter got 'mongst ther Blackfeet, an' I'll darned ter mighty of he didn't e'ena'most wipe out ther hull tribe."

Beriah told the story of what had occurred in the canyon, keeping back only that part which referred to Mountain Cat. The young Indian had asked him to say nothing about him, and the miner was faithful to his promise.

"Now, then," said Gaffer, triumphantly, "what d'ye think about ther Elk Rider bein' Old Nick?"

"The point is not yet proved—"

"Oh! it'll be proved fast enough ef he gets in a few o' his fiery bolts on ter you!"

"Thank you; I don't hanker; but I am not yet ready to believe Old Nick, as you term his unpopular majesty, is galloping around the country on an elk. I saw the pair myself, and if they didn't have an earthly look, then no one has."

"Mebbe you've see'd a rale elk that could jump ther barranca ez he did!" snorted Golightly.

"Or ther barricade," added Beriah.

"Both extraordinary feats, no doubt," said Temple, "but you admit the elk is larger than the average—"

"But whar does he get ther fire-bolts—jest sech ez are used in a thunder-shower?" interrupted Beriah.

"D'ye s'pose a man went up an' got 'em?" added Gaffer.

"An' rid a r'ale elk up inter ther clouds?" supplemented Beriah.

Temple put out his hands to stop them. He might as well talk science to turn a norther from its course as to reason with them. Honest and well-meaning men, they were imbued with superstition, and logic fell powerless on their ears.

"I have only one word to say," he added, "and that is this, since I cannot convince you in any other way, I am going to capture or kill the Elk Rider."

"Not with my help!" declared Golightly.

"Nur with mine!" added Brown.

"Thank you for nothing; I haven't asked you yet. But we won't quarrel, gentlemen. What will you drink?"

They nominated their favorite fluids, and harmony reigned around the board.

Somewhat later that night a dark figure approached the house of Isaac Leonard, after all had become dark and silent there. Even Agnes had fallen asleep; but one clinched hand and a dreamy muttering showed that her mind still ran in the old course. But she neither heard nor saw the intruder.

For the prowling figure speedily developed into an intruder, first gaining the roof of an out-house, and then creeping through a window. There he paused to listen, for he did not wish to be discovered. All remained silent. Then he went on, slowly and carefully, for he was not acquainted with the arrangement of the house; but his movements were marked with cat-like noiselessness.

When he reached a door he opened it very carefully, and then again paused to listen. The heavy breathing of a sleeper reached his ears. He stole forward for several paces and then paused, drew something from his garments, and a bar of light shot out in that way peculiar to a dark-lantern.

The hand that held it was almost as brown as the japanned side of the lantern; it was the hand of an Indian, and the Indian was Mountain Cat, the Pawnee.

In the days of King Philip such a light was not considered a necessary part of a warrior's accouterments; but civilization and dark-lanterns invariably go together. A third object often accompanies them—a burglar.

The light from the bull's-eye fell upon a bed; the Pawnee turned his wrist, and it fell upon a sleeper. It was Isaac Leonard. The great man of Quartz Rock lay sleeping soundly, unconscious of the dark shadow which had crossed his threshold. Had he seen him it would have been anything but an agreeable sight.

Mountain Cat drew his knife and drew forward. The movement was a decidedly ominous one and Leonard's life seemed near its end. He has thrown the bed-clothing a little back in his sleep and his broad chest was without any covering that could protect it from the stroke. One blow and he would be done with plotting.

But the Pawnee did not strike.

He paused a few feet from the bed and, standing like a statue, looked earnestly at the sleeper's face for a full minute. Then, with a quick nod, he moved forward and set his lantern on a table. Next, he advanced to the bed and, unbuttoning Leonard's shirt-sleeve, pushed it back until the arm was bare to the elbow. Woe unto the great man if he awoke then!

He did not awake, and Mountain Cat stood gazing on a device in India ink representing an eagle trying to break a chain which confined him. It was a realistic piece of work, once seen never to be forgotten.

Again the Pawnee nodded; then he turned aside, took his lantern and left the room and the house. Leonard slept on.

"It is he!" muttered the late intruder. "I am now sure and I will press on and wring heart and brain of this man. My heel is on his neck!"

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED BLOW FOR MISSOURI.

LIKE every other place crowded by regular business people, Brown Hand Ferry had its "rush" in the early forenoon. In this case the rush was never startling, but for almost an hour both boats were kept busy conveying the miners over on their way to their place of labor.

On the morning following the scenes last related, this rush was just over when a messenger came to Missouri with the information that Isaac Leonard wished to see her at his house. It was a genuine surprise. Since she started the ferry she had seldom had any talk with the great man, and had never been inside his house. What he could have to say now she did not know.

Yet, his importance in the place gave him a nominal right to be heard, if not obeyed, and she prepared to go, leaving the ferry in charge of her negro assistants.

She was soon at Leonard's house and was promptly ushered into his presence. He was about to do a mean act, but it was nothing new for him and he went about it with the blandness he could so well assume.

"You received my message, I see?"

"I did, sir," Missouri answered, "though I cannot imagine why you wish to see me?"

"It is about the ferry."

The girl looked surprised.

"What about the ferry?" she somewhat brusquely asked.

"Well, I have of late been approached by many of our townspeople on the subject, and it is the general opinion that it ought to be run by a man."

"What is the matter with it as 'tis now?"

"Well, they allege want of accommodation and—well, in short—they think the work that of a man rather than of a woman."

"In that case, why didn't some of them start the line before I came to Quartz Rock?"

"I suppose no one thought of it."

"That's it exactly!" said Missouri spiritedly.

"No one ever suspected there was money in the pool until I established the fact; they even laughed at me when I put my boats on; but now that the Brown Hand is paying well, they want to steal the product of my brains, do they?"

"Aren't you putting it a little strong?" asked Leonard, who, in spite of all his audacity, was confused and staggered by such an animated cross fire.

"Strong! Suppose some one should steal your mine—what would you say to that?"

"But there's a difference between a mine and this ferry."

"Yes, and there's a difference between a rich man like you and a poor girl with no one to fight her battles. Which is the best able to lose his or her present income?"

"But you see the river was common property before you started the ferry."

"So was your mine until you claimed and begun to work it."

"Now see here, girl," said Leonard, who was like a badly-beaten and fleeing army, "it won't do any good to turn the tables on me. The

cases are not in any degree similar. The laws of the United States hold that if a man finds a mine and works it, in such a wild country as this, it is his beyond all quarrel until worked out; but where can you find a law that gives a person proprietorship of water? Your ferry is a line crossing the Missouri river, a great stream which flows through our country for miles and miles. But do you own it? Does any person, man or woman, own it? No, Miss Soo; and the waters of our country cannot be owned. You have no legal right to the water over which you row your boat."

The great man delivered this legal opinion in a ponderous manner, but Missouri was not yet crushed.

"How about the moral right? Who has a better right to the Brown Hand Ferry than I, who have purchased boats, put them into use, accommodated the public, and built up a business by hard and industrious labor?"

"That isn't the point," said Leonard, with a wave of his hand. "The people say a man is needed to run the ferry."

"Well, I have two men there, already."

"Negroes," said Leonard, scornfully.

"I believe a certain amendment of the Constitution makes them free and our equals!"

"The Constitution has nothing to do with us; we are a community by ourselves."

"Yet, only a moment ago, you quoted profusely from United States laws to uphold your position!"

Leonard glared at her for a moment in speechless anger.

"See here, girl, are you trying to argue with me?" he then wrathfully cried.

"No, sir," Missouri quietly replied, "but I am trying to show you it would be a great injustice to deprive me of the Brown Hand. Who wants it?"

"Michael Mulloy."

"What has he done to deserve it?"

"The office seeks the man, not the man the office."

"Very likely, for I never knew Mulloy to seek much of anything except a whisky-bottle. I understand you would have expelled him from town but for John Purcell's interference. And that is the man you would place in charge of the ferry, is it?"

Leonard was by this time in a fury. He was the lord and master of Quartz Rock and his word was law, but, partly because he had been forced to admire Missouri's courage and enterprise, and because he knew his lukewarm followers would regard the dispossessing of a friendless girl as petty meanness, he had thought to make a show of reason, (?) argument and blandness, and accomplish the work without any hostility.

But he was so signally worsted in this argument that he lost all temper.

"If you want to argue, go outside and do it!" he angrily said. "I have heard enough of it and won't listen to another word. As for the Brown Hand Ferry, it will be as I said. I prefer that Mulloy takes charge of it, and I want you to remember that matters always go as I say. Now, go, but be careful and not row a boat over the ferry to-morrow."

"Suppose I arrange a cable line?"

"I tell you you are done with the place. Mulloy will pay you what is right for the boats and use of the ferry—"

"Thank you, sir," said Missouri, coolly, "but I decline to sell the boats!"

A red flush of anger mounted to Leonard's cheeks. Here was a stumbling-block he had not considered.

"You do?" he ejaculated.

"I do, sir."

"Then, by Judas! we will take them by force!"

"I shall defend them at the muzzle of a revolver," said the girl, her voice clear and even, though there was an ominous flash in her eyes. "Since you drive me to the wall, I will say, frankly, that I'll shoot the person who tries to take them away, and I don't believe the honest men of the town will blame me for so doing."

Ay, there was the rub. Ruler of Quartz Rock he was, but he was not omnipotent there, and he, too, believed there were men who would not see bodily harm come to the mistress of the Brown Hand.

This dilemma was an unexpected one. He had been prepared for a flood of feminine tears and reproaches, but that the girl would boldly stand out against him seemed beyond credence.

He would have given a good deal to break the pluck he had so admired in the past.

"Very well; you can keep your infernal boats!" he finally said, "for Mulloy can construct a raft which will answer for a day or two."

"I shall compete with him for patronage," said Missouri, firmly, though her voice never arose above a lady-like key.

"You will?"

"Yes, sir."

"We will see," hotly answered Leonard. "I own every foot of the land on which this town stands, and to the water's edge. Now, if you so much as touch one of your boats against the bank I will have you arrested for trespass."

Mr. Leonard went pretty strong on legal points, and he found his flock always ready to obey him—except when the legal elephant trod on their own toes.

"Perhaps you outlaw me from the town, too?"

"No," said Leonard, after a moment's hesitation, during which he considered whether it was safe for him to decide affirmatively. "I have no wish to be harsh, and if you are reasonable you can still remain a citizen of Quartz Rock."

Missouri's lip curled with scorn, but as she was far from being ready to admit defeat, or to surrender her rights, she did not look so far ahead as to the time when she would be done with the Brown Hand.

"Is that all you have to say?" she asked.

"Yes," he slowly replied.

"Then I'll go."

She went, without any more ceremonious farewell, while Leonard sat staring after her until Agnes opened a side-door and entered the room. She had been a listener to the whole interview.

"What a cat!" she observed.

"Cat!" echoed Leonard. "I should say she was a full-grown jaguar, or grizzly bear, or something of that sort."

"Why didn't you box her ears?"

Isaac looked at his daughter in unspeakable horror for a moment.

"Ye gods!" he then answered, "I would as soon box the aforesaid grizzly. She would have put a bullet through me!"

"Bah! I would like to deal with her!" and Miss Agnes snapped her fingers contemptuously.

"You had better not. You have a good deal of tiger-cat in you; I am not sure but all women have; but that little girl has not only temper and nerve, but judgment, which is to people what a main spring is to a watch."

"Don't talk nonsense!" said his dutiful daughter. "We have a desperate character to deal with. Are you equal to it, or shall I take charge?"

"For, remove her from Temple's path I will."

"You can rely on me," said he, grimly. "I'll carry out every threat I made to her; trust my word, she don't run the ferry to-morrow. As for Temple, bewitch him if you can; I am as anxious as you can be."

Agnes did not yet suspect how anxious he was.

CHAPTER XI.

MISSOURI ASTONISHES HER ENEMIES.

AFTER leaving the house the ferry-girl at once returned to her place of business. Her manner was far from being dejected; the red flush on her cheeks and the sparkle of her eyes told that indignation and rebellion were at work; but she was well aware that it would be a fight against strong odds to oppose the great man of Quartz Rock.

If he chose to force the fight she would be helpless, but she was aware that, though the village people were not angels, they had a sense of what was right when it was not a matter affecting their own pockets; and that many would object to seeing her driven away from the ferry if she but made a resistance and called their attention to the matter.

This resistance she was resolved to make; after that all depended on how much regard Leonard would have for public opinion.

Reaching the ferry she found the larger boat just touching the further bank with a freight, while near her own craft sat Mr. Jack Purcell.

"Good-morning, Miss Soo," he said, in his blandest way.

The girl nodded.

"Do you wish to cross?" she tersely asked.

"No," Jack answered. "I came down to talk with you. I have just learned from Mike Mulloy that he has put in a bid for the ferry."

"Have you?"

"Yes; and, as he says Isaac Leonard is going to back him, it looks rather bad for you."

"In what way?"

"Why, Leonard is high chief here, and what he says goes as he says it."

"The chances do seem against me," Missouri quietly observed, for she felt sure Purcell had something of importance to say.

"It is a shame, and I told Mike so; but he is angry about the trouble at the ferry and vows he will push the matter to the uttermost. I was hasty in that quarrel, and though Gaffer was equally so when he threw me out of the boat, I have not laid up any spite. But it is different with Mulloy. He swears the Brown Hand shall be his."

"I have been notified to leave."

"It is not right; it is a shame!"

"Well, there's no help for it, I suppose."

Purcell's eyes twinkled with anticipated triumph.

"Mulloy has always been tractable until now, but he refuses to talk with me. However, his mood may change before to-morrow, and I'll go for him again. If you had a male protector, this matter could quickly be turned in your favor. Even I, if I had your leave, could save the Brown Hand."

"What would you do?"

"First of all, induce Mulloy to give it up. I

understand him like a book, and when I settle down to business he is clay in my hands. This done, I would speak to Leonard, and you could keep the ferry as long as you wished."

"What is to hinder your doing so, anyway?"

"It would never do," said Purcell, shaking his head; "it would cause too much talk. I wish I could help you, Soo, and if you will give me the right I will save the Brown Hand."

"Why, haven't you a right now?" asked the girl, in pretended surprise.

"You don't understand. If I took charge of the case men would say: 'By what right do you interfere?' and I could make no answer. But I would have them bound hand foot, as I may express it, if I could say, 'I am the father, or brother, or husband of Missouri,' or anything of that kind. Not bearing any of these relationships to you, I can see but one way. Promise to marry me—give me the right to say you are my future wife, and I will defeat your enemies and save the ferry!"

Mr. Purcell warmed to his subject and delivered the closing sentences with considerable oratorical power and vim; but Missouri's lips curled scornfully. Her once-discarded suitor had clearly shown his hand.

"Your little game won't work," she replied.

"My little game! What do you mean?"

"Simply that I understand the whole affair. I am not warned out of the Brown Hand to oblige Mr. Mulloy, but to enable Jack Purcell to win his game. You are at the bottom of it all; you have been to Leonard and filled his ears until he has agreed to your scheme, and it is now the idea to give me a choice between marrying you or losing the ferry. It won't work, sir; I will not marry you—not to save a dozen ferries!"

Conscious guilt, shame and dismay were pictured on the blackleg's face, but they gave place to a look of mad anger.

"Beware!" he cried, hotly.

"Of you? Thank you, sir, but I am not of the kind to be frightened. I have always cared for myself in the past, and I intend to do so in the future. I intend to keep the Brown Hand without your help, and I warn you not to molest me."

"Girl, you are mad—you wrong me—"

"Excuse me, but I see a passenger coming and must leave you. Do not allude to this subject again; having penetrated your scheme you do not stand in a very enviable light."

She turned away and entered her boat, the passenger arrived and took his place, and then she pulled away from the bank, leaving Purcell to vent his wrath on empty air.

Waldo Temple kept his appointment that day for a stroll with Agnes and the mountain scenery was seen from its most favorable points. There was enough to interest and cause admiration, and these points were to be classed as cardinal ones—the river winding through the valley, the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains proper off at the west, and the dividing line of the foothills at the east, where they ultimately gave place to the prairies where the flocks and herds of the white man have since come to graze so numerous.

Agnes had never been in a more amiable and pleasant mood, and Temple had no inkling to the warfare being carried on against Missouri.

His companion never forgot it. All her anger was aroused against her inoffensive rival, but she veiled her bitterness under a mantle of gentleness.

And when they separated she was strong in the belief that all was working well; that Temple was yielding to her fascination.

And thus the night had fallen with them.

The following morning Isaac Leonard arose at an early hour. He had been dreaming of the ferry-girl in an unpleasant way all night, and as he felt sure there would be trouble at the Brown Hand he was resolved to be on the scene at the hour when traffic usually began. Mike Mulloy had manufactured a raft which would answer for conveying human freight for a few days, and it was hoped those who wished to take horses across would be willing to swim them.

All was prepared to utterly crush Missouri in a business way, and Jack Purcell, stung by his last rebuff, was helping Mike all he could.

Leonard left the house and started for the ferry, but as he turned Monmouth Rock he paused in dumfounded anger.

Missouri's boat was crossing the river, as usual, and heading for the north bank.

A bitter exclamation fell from Leonard's lips. "She is defying me, but I will show her it can't be done with impunity. I said I would arrest her for trespass if the prow of her boat so much as touched the bank, and I'll do it!"

So saying, he strode forward rapidly.

Half a dozen miners were gathered at the landing, waiting, it seemed, for the two boats to return, and Leonard pushed past them to be the first to meet Missouri.

There was no sign of Mulloy, or of his raft.

Something else at once arrested Leonard's attention, however. During the night a miniature pier had been built near the bank, just above the usual landing, and as the girl reached

the spot she laid her craft alongside the new construction, and, paying no attention to the great man, looked at the miners.

"All aboard, gentlemen," she said, cheerily; "the other boat will be here in half a minute."

The miners stepped upon the pier, but Leonard went with them and pushed to the front.

"Hold!" he exclaimed. "I forbid this. Missouri is no longer in charge of the ferry. I have given the right to our fellow-citizen, Michael Mulloy—"

"Whar is he? I don't see him nowhar," interrupted a miner.

"He seems to be a little late, but he will be here directly. In the mean while, you will greatly oblige me by refusing to give this wayward girl your patronage. As for you, miss, I am surprised at you. Did I not tell you, yesterday, after you insulted me so grossly, that I would have you arrested if you plied your boat on the river?"

"You said you would arrest me for trespass if I touched my boat to the bank, which you claim to own," answered Soo, clearly. "Very well, I have not touched the bank. You will see that I have manufactured a pier, from which to receive my passengers."

"It is just the same thing," declared Leonard, almost trembling with anger and his efforts to remain calm. "What's the difference whether the boat or the pier touches the bank?"

"If you will look closely you will see the pier does not touch the bank!"

Leonard looked and saw that she was right. A stone, or sort of ledge, of which the greater part was underground, came down to the water's edge and formed a step about two feet high. Close to this, but with a foot of clear water between, the pier had been built, and though passengers could easily step from the rock to the pier, the latter did not infringe on the shore.

The new construction, itself, was built with a foundation of stones, with proper-sized logs on top, and was a firm and serviceable article. Missouri had herself designed it, and the work had occupied her negroes nearly all night.

"This makes no difference," said Leonard. "You had no right to build such a concern."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because the water comes under the same rules, regulations and objections that the bank does, and is as much under my control! I command you to break up your pier, as you call it!"

"I will trouble you to remember, Mr. Leonard, that you told me yesterday that the Missouri river was the property of the United States; that no person could control it; that water could not be owned by any one; and that the use of this stream was free to all!"

CHAPTER XII.

MIKE MULLOY TAKES THE WAR-PATH.

LEONARD stood dumfounded. He remembered advancing the very views Missouri had quoted; views he had laid down as unimpeachable facts; but he had not then thought of the possibility of their being turned against him.

Now that they were, he did not know what to say.

The assembled miners winked at each other in a way which indicated they were more or less in the ferry-girl's confidence and that their sympathy was with her. The second boat at this moment arrived and there was ample accommodation for all who wished to cross, but no one embarked and the negroes sat rolling their eyes about and smiling good-naturedly.

G. Wash Adams and T. Jeff Adams were of a courageous nature and ready to uphold their mistress in all things.

The ominous pause was broken by a new arrival and Mike Mulloy came down to the landing with half a dozen men carrying his raft. He did not see the rival boats nor the pier, because of the assembled miners, and his red face was redder than ever with triumph and pride.

"Begorra, b'yes," he said, "it's Mike Mulloy phat has overslape dhis mornin', but it shill not happen again at all. Putt dhe raft in dhe wather, fellers, an' we'll all go over. Dhat's roight; now hand me dhe paddle. Now, jintlemen, get aboard an' we— Dhe ould Nick!"

Mulloy broke off suddenly. He had stepped upon his raft, but as he got time to look around, the crowd parted, and he saw the pier, the rival boats, and pretty Missouri.

A more surprised and dismayed man was seldom seen, and with wide-open eyes and mouth, he stared in silence.

But Leonard pressed to the front.

"Take your passengers and cross, Mulloy," he directed.

Mike started as from a troubled dream.

"All aboard, jintlemen; we are ready to crass."

But not a man stirred.

"Thank you, Michael," said one grim old miner, "but when we go over, we will go in ther old way. A boat is good enough for us."

"But I have made over the ferry-right to Mulloy," expostulated Leonard.

"Wal, Soo seems ter be still in business, an' while we kin get a light, sound boat we ain't

goin' ter patronize no one-hoss raft, yer honor!"

There was so much reason in what he said, that Leonard had to silently acknowledge the fact. But the opposition led him beyond the bounds of prudence.

"Take the boats away, Mulloy!" he directed. "Bedad, an' I'll do dhat same, moighty quick!"

And Mike leaped ashore to execute his purpose.

By that time half the village had turned out to witness the unusual excitement, and as they began to understand the case, there were murmurs of indignation at Leonard's course. And of the grim old fellows on the pier, a close observer might safely have prophesied that they would see no harm come to Missouri.

Mulloy leaped upon the pier, intent on seizing the smaller boat, but as he did so, G. Wash Adams stepped from the large one and confronted him.

"No trespassin' allowed hyar, sah," observed the son of Africa, in a firm voice.

"Get out av me way, ye black nagur!" said Mike, loudly.

"Not ef dis court is pussonally acquainted wid herself," Wash retorted.

"Begorra, it's meself will knock yer two eyes inter wan ef yez don't."

"Better catch de coon, afore you cook him, sah."

Mulloy shook a ponderous fist before the undaunted eyes of G. Wash Adams.

"I give ye jest wan minute ter cl'ar dhe way, an' ef yez ain't gone dhen there'll be a dead coon 'round hyar."

"Ef dar is one he'll hab a white skin. Yah! yah!" laughed Wash; then, changing his tone: "Now, look-a-hyar, don't ye come foolin' 'round dis chile. I's a 'streamly bad man when my mad is up. I's a turned-over, brown-on-boffsides terror from Texas, an' a cavortin' cyclone from Mt. Chinborago, I is. Don't tech me, or I'll break you in two. I gibs you f'ar warnin' you's trespassin' on private property. Git off ob it! Levant! Abshambulate!"

Mr. Adams put up a dusky fist beside that of his opponent, but, dark as it was, it proved a red flag of war. Mulloy shot out his clinched hand in attempt to annihilate Wash—and hit the air beautifully. No further damage was done.

But the unavailing stroke left an opening Wash did not neglect. He rushed to close quarters, caught Mulloy by the waist and then, getting the proper hold, cast him far out into the water of the river.

There was a loud-sounding splash, as though some monster of the deep had arisen in his might, and Mike disappeared from public view. His retirement was but temporary; being a good swimmer, he soon came to the surface and made for the boat in which T. Jeff Adams was sitting, a broad grin on his dusky face.

But the smile vanished when he saw Mulloy's intention.

"Keep back dar!" he ordered, raising one oar.

"No Irish needn't ter apply!"

Mike laid one hand on the gunwale and looked at Jeff threateningly. Then the oar shot out like a spear, straight for the Irishman's head, but the latter dodged briskly and caught the oar with both hands.

"Golly! I's done got a bite!"

So spoke Jeff, and then he squared the oar around until he had it as a farmer uses a pitchfork and—lifted. The oar bent and there seemed danger that it would break, but it was large and strong; it remained whole and Mulloy arose from the water suddenly, his heels became elevated above his head, and with an involuntary somersault he shot into space and again dropped heavily into the water.

He had had enough, and when he arose again he made for land and stood dripping on the bank.

A cheer arose from the crowd, but it had the effect of stirring Leonard into fresh fury.

"Sheriff Webber, arrest those men!" he ordered, pointing to the negroes. "Let the charge be assault and battery."

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted Missouri, "but I have your word that you don't own, and cannot control, this river. Besides, Mulloy was the first offender; you cannot arrest my men for defending themselves."

"Ther gal is roight, 'squire," added Sheriff Webber.

He was a zealous follower of Leonard, but all his sympathies were with the girl since she had shown such courage.

Isaac Leonard was not a fool, and he saw that to force hostilities in the face of a crowd so strongly opposed to him would greatly weaken his power at Quartz Rock. He was wise enough to decide to retreat from an unenviable position and, in a cooler moment, plan another way for depriving the girl of the ferry.

"For the present you can have your own way," he said, looking darkly at Missouri, "but I warn you I shall not tolerate such deeds in this town. It has been a peaceful, law-abiding place and it shall remain so. I will leave now, but let me warn you once more, do not dare touch your boat to the bank."

With this parting shot he wheeled and strode away from the group. Mulloy looked after him ruefully. His fighting blood was up and he only needed a word from his chief to draw his revolver and use it for all it was worth, but when he saw Isaac thus desert the field he was wise enough not to proceed to further hostilities.

But he resolved to run his raft and get what custom he could, so he pushed through the crowd—and then stood dumfounded. While he had been busy elsewhere the raft had slowly floated along the edge of the pond, and, when he saw it, was just nearing the point where the water left the pond and went racing down the canyon.

Mike uttered a roar and dashed along the bank to save it. Too late! The rough water caught it, it was whirled around once, and then, like a swimmer hesitating before a dive, it wavered, trembled and then shot down the raceway.

By the time it reached calmer water, half a mile below, no two sticks would be hanging together.

And Mike Mulloy turned his back on the crowd and his face toward the town and went away muttering threats both loud and deep. Looking back once, he saw both of Soo's boats crossing the ferry, loaded to their utmost capacity.

It was a bitter defeat.

Among those who had watched the scene were Temple, Gaffer and Beriah. They had not interfered, for they saw there was no need of it, but they had been ready to help Missouri if such a thing was needed.

"This is a shameful move on Leonard's part," said Waldo, as he watched the baffled great man go away. "I cannot imagine why he should persecute a girl."

"Tain't no great conundrum ter me," said Gaffer. "I had a word with Soo afore you two come, an' the case is plain. It was all a job set afoot by that 'tarnal Jack Purcell. Wish ter gracious he'd never got out when I tossed him inter ther drink."

He then explained the condition under which Purcell had assured Missouri she could keep the Brown Hand and they thought the mystery solved, but none of them suspected the real facts of the case—that Agnes Leonard's love and hate were at the bottom of the persecution.

In the mean while, Isaac had returned to the house. He found his daughter just making her appearance in the sitting-room. She was not an early riser.

"What success?" she asked; but she had caught the expression on his face and suspected defeat.

"Success!" he echoed. "Well, I have had the success of being thoroughly beaten. That confounded girl has proved herself sharper than a needle, and she holds the Brown Hand."

Agnes's face became darkened by an unpleasant scowl.

"How was it?" she tersely asked.

Isaac told the whole story. As he finished she stamped her delicate foot angrily on the floor.

"Were you mad, that you allowed yourself to be outdone and defied by such an insignificant girl?"

"I was not mad enough to proceed to hostilities and turn all Quartz Rock against me. To remain ruler here I must use judgment. But, look ye, Agnes, I haven't given up the battle yet, by a good deal. I'll win in the end."

"If you don't I'll take a hand in the game!" cried the beauty.

"No, no! You must do nothing so rash. What! I be permanently beaten by the ferry-girl? I think not. I will form new plans, and she shall go out of the Brown Hand or under the river-waters!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE.

SHORTLY after noon Waldo Temple shouldered his rifle and left the town alone. To Gaffer he had carelessly said he was going out for a stroll, and the hunter was shrewd enough to suspect he was not wanted. Knowing the young man was of a more romantic temperament than himself, it was Gaffer's unspoken verdict that he "prob'ly wanted ter commune with Natur'."

Temple would have been reluctant to give his real reason, for it was like hunting for a needle in a hay-mow.

Ever since he had seen the Elk Rider his mind had dwelt upon this mountain enigma a good deal. Who and what was he? Not having any superstition in his nature, he rejected all the theories of his humbler friends. Lightning Bolt was as much a creature of flesh and blood as himself, and he believed he could shoot either man or elk if allowed a fair chance. True, Gaffer, a superior marksman, had fired unavailingly, but he was at the time under superstitious fear, and his nerves must have been unstrung.

Yet, Waldo was not prepared to say he would take the shot if he had a chance; so far as he had learned Lightning Bolt had only been a scourge to the Blackfeet, and such a man should not be hunted like a wild animal.

That day the young man went out hoping to see the strange rider, but, knowing he was like a will-o'-the-wisp, without any real confidence.

He soon left the town behind him, and was treading a wild and broken country, which was especially rich in canyons, cliffs and eccentricities of nature. Having reached an elevated point, he sat down on a boulder and let his gaze wander over the scene before him.

At one point he had a view of a wide, deep canyon, and as he looked along its bed he chanced to observe something not always to be seen there.

What looked to be like a giant serpent was winding along the level bottom, but as he looked closer he discovered it to be composed of horsemen riding in single file.

"Blackfeet!"

Temple leaped to the conclusion because no other men were supposed to be in that part of Montana in such numbers, but it occurred to him a moment later that some bold white men might have entered the feudal Territory, and he was seized by a resolve to know the truth.

His time was his own, and it would be good exercise to pursue the winding serpent.

This resolve made, he was not long in starting on the trail; and he advanced so rapidly that, a half-hour later, he again sighted the strangers, who had come to a halt in a bowl-like depression which comprised three or four acres of land.

Still from his position he was unable to determine their character, and he resolved to go nearer. So he descended the side of the bowl and again moved forward, this time taking care not to reveal himself by any rash exposure.

Boulders and stray trees helped him, and he soon reached a sort of mound, which was finely adapted for concealment.

He crawled in among the rocks and bushes, and reaching the top, looked over at the campers.

They were Indians, and beyond doubt, the men of Bounding Bison. The band had an entirely original way of painting themselves, and this had been so described by Gaffer that Temple could make no mistake.

He looked with a good deal of curiosity at the men who were the scourges of the foothills, but except for their fantastic style of painting, they were in no degree remarkable. They were eating dinner, and Temple lay still and watched them idly.

He tried to distinguish Bounding Bison, but if the chief was there he failed to discover it. The sequel proved he was not there.

All men have surprises in their lives, and Temple's came when a heavy weight dropped upon him and his arms were seized in a way which defied all his efforts to cast off the unwelcome grasp. He realized that he had fallen into trouble of a serious nature, and did his utmost, but all in vain.

He was whirled over on his back and a knife flashed before his eyes.

"Lie still, dog of a pale-face! Do not anger the mountain tiger unless you would feel his death-stroke!"

Temple was gazing into the faces of three grim Blackfeet, and with such odds at hand and more within call he decided to take heed of the last warning. He lay passively in their grasp and looked at him who had spoken.

Beyond a doubt it was Bounding Bison himself.

The hands of his captors glided over his person, and his weapons were taken away; then they deftly bound his own hands and he was wholly helpless. They raised him to his feet, and the chief chuckled grimly:

"The white man is a squaw of his nation. Does he think he can steal upon a Blackfoot camp and not be seen? He must come from near the rising sun or he would not be so big a fool."

Very good English the Bison spoke, and though a little of the figurative element ran through it, it was clear he had not mixed with white men for nothing.

"Well, you do seem to have the best of it," Temple replied, trying to remain cool and accept the inevitable philosophically. "Perhaps, however, it was not so much my want of wisdom as your abundance of it that did the damage."

"The Blackfeet are men, and when they rest for the day they do not lie down like white men and leave the way clear for enemies. When first you set foot in the valley you were seen, and it was not hard to bag you."

Temple felt chagrined, but he forced a laugh. "Well, I compliment you on your shrewdness."

"Never mind; the Blackfeet do not feed on soft words. Speak for yourself, not for us. What do you want with the mountain tigers?"

"Nothing," Temple frankly replied. "I saw a camp in the valley and crawled here to learn who was abroad. I had no other object."

"Who are you?"

Temple remembered the alleged fact that Bounding Bison was the ally of Isaac Leonard, and resolved to make the most of it.

"My name is Temple, and I belong at Quartz Rock."

"I have never seen you there."

"Very likely. I am a new-comer; so much so that Mr. Leonard has not yet given me my permanent place."

Bounding Bison looked at him keenly.

"You do not know Leonard," he said, positively.

"On the contrary, I have been a guest at his house."

The chief made a sweeping gesture indicating a want of belief in the assertion.

"Do not think a Blackfoot is blind. Men who know Bounding Bison well would never try to deceive him. I doubt if you have ever been at the town; at any rate, you are not one of the people."

Here the speaker made a gesture which might ordinarily have escaped Temple's notice as being significant, but all his senses were on the alert and a suspicion flashed upon him. Between the Blackfeet and the chosen people of Quartz Rock there was a sort of free-masonry, with mystic signs by which they recognized each other. The Bison had given one of these signs and he had no way to meet it in kind.

Extreme caution and sagacity were now necessary.

"Strictly speaking, I am not one of the people," he answered, frankly. "I have just told you I am a new-comer and Leonard has not placed me. I came to the West as an aimless wanderer; but I chanced upon Quartz Rock and Leonard seemed to take a fancy to me. I have visited him at his house and I am to remain permanently at his village."

Another gesture followed. It was different from the rest, but was undoubtedly one of the secret list. Still, it was as much of an enigma as an Egyptian hieroglyphic, and Temple was obliged to look stolidly at the Indian and say nothing.

The painted face changed expression and became sterner, and Temple felt that he had passed more deeply into trouble. Possibly Bounding Bison had made the first sign of the league, and, failing to get the due answer, had lost all faith in his prisoner.

He muttered a few words in a language unknown to the young man—probably it was Blackfoot—and then turned away. The other Indians led Temple after and all proceeded toward the camp.

The prisoner deeply regretted his rashness. With no knowledge of Indian ways and only a vague idea of their shrewdness, he had no business to have been prowling about their camp. If he had used proper caution he would have given wide berth to men known to be the scourges of the foothills.

One suspicion had occurred to him while talking. He very much doubted if Bounding Bison was an Indian. His features were very regular for one of that race, and though decked out bravely in their style, and holding a chief's position, he seemed more like a white man. At times he used figurative language freely, but it was but temporarily and he seemed to have a strong inclination to drop into matter-of-fact English.

This suspicion did not encourage Temple. In any case the fellow was Leonard's ally and set to terrorize the foothills, and, unless he convinced him he was Leonard's friend, also, he would thereby only be the more zealous to do the work allotted him.

When the prisoner was led into the midst of the other men they saw his arrival with characteristic stoicism. No one exhibited interest, nor was their post prandial smoking stopped, but Temple believed he caught more than one glare turned secretly on him.

And a more villainous-looking set of redskins he had never seen in his life. It was as though some Indian penitentiary had been drafted upon to make Bounding Bison's band, or, lacking these penitentiaries, they had created this party instead.

Temple began to feel decidedly uneasy.

His guards took him to one side a little, motioned him to be seated on a boulder, and then squatted down near him to continue their watch. And their vigilance never flagged.

Bounding Bison sat down in the middle of his party and began smoking like the rest, but Temple noticed that he seemed in deep thought and, now and then, glanced toward him.

Undoubtedly, he was deciding what to do with his captive, and as the latter looked at the grim, painted, red cut-throats he felt a thrill of uneasiness he had seldom known before.

CHAPTER XIV.

BOUNDING BISON SEEKS RECREATION.

PERHAPS half an hour passed, and then the Blackfoot chief knocked the ashes out of his pipe, arose and walked to his prisoner's side.

"I am Bounding Bison, a Blackfoot, and royal blood flows in my veins," he bombastically began. "Had I remained with the main body of my people I should now have been the head-chief of the nation, but I preferred the life I have chosen. I took the bravest men of all who were of my blood and, coming to the foothills, cut loose from my people."

He paused and looked at Temple, as though for an answer.

"I see," said the prisoner.

"Here I am a king. Followed by my mountain tigers, no man can say 'Come!' or 'Go!' to me. I am my own master and the master of all the broad acres from the highest peaks of the Rockies to the eastern plains; from the head-waters of the Yellowstone to Canada. On my domain no man may come with impunity. If the Blackfeet catch him he is doomed, and they have the eye of the hawk and the scent of the bloodhound."

Again he paused and nodded.

"I have often heard of Bounding Bison," he said.

"Then, why did you not keep away from him?"

"I like to meet a brave man, and such I know the Bison to be."

"The white man is cunning, but he cannot throw dust in the Bison's eyes. A Blackfoot is never blind; he knows words of sincere praise from designing flattery. What you say will not save you. You are a prisoner and, as an intruder on the grounds of the Blackfeet, you will be punished. My braves are longing for some pleasure amid their active work, and you will be given over for torture."

"What have I done that I should be used thus?" asked Temple, trying to hide his fears.

"I say you are an intruder on our grounds."

"Have I done harm to you or your men?"

"If the rattlesnake's fangs are early removed he will never do harm to any one."

Temple did not give up so tamely. He saw that the chief was in earnest, and as his own life was, to him, the most valuable thing in the world, he made an eloquent effort to save it. Especially did he dwell on the fact that he had been received as a friend by Leonard—but all in vain.

Bounding Bison regarded the story as a fiction, and resolved that his men should have the prisoner for torture.

He made some speech to them in their own language, and though they preserved a degree of stolidity, it plainly pleased them a good deal, and their gazes were turned on the prisoner in a way which made his flesh creep.

He was as brave as the average man, but who can face without a tremor the prospect of dying by tortures such as as Indians invent and inflict?

There was some consultation among them, and then Bounding Bison again came to his side.

"You will be gashed with knives first of all," he coolly said. "The warriors wish to hear you cry aloud for mercy, like a dog."

"Suppose I won't cry?" questioned Temple, his pride touched by the insinuation.

"All white men do; they can bear pain no better than an Indian pappoose."

"Are you sure you are not libeling your own race?"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply, that I believe you are a white man!"

The chief made a disdainful gesture.

"If a drop of white blood ran in my veins, I would open them with my own knife, and let it out. I curse the race, and all who mix with them!"

"Renegades usually hold such views."

"Hearken, white dog!" exclaimed the Bison, angrily; "you are a fool to stir the blood of a Blackfoot. You know me not. I am Indian, all Indian, and I curse your race! If you would not have your torments doubled, be wise and say no more. I am a Blackfoot and my name is Bounding Bison!"

"Well, you are Isaac Leonard's friend and so am I. Why should we quarrel? Do not be hasty, but go to Leonard before you strike me. Ask him if he knows Waldo Temple. I will willingly die ten deaths if he does not bid you let me go."

"A trick! Blackfeet are men and not to be deceived by such silly stories. Besides, why should I go to Leonard? Is he not an enemy of my people? Is not his village on the land of my tribe?"

"Every one knows you and he are friends—"

"A white man's lie!" said the Bison, quickly.

"Say no more; I will not hear it!"

He motioned to his warriors and they released Temple's hands and disrobed him to the waist. He stood passive in their hands, but he closed his eyes to hide the gleam he knew must be there. Since his future looked so desperate he resolved to take the one chance open to him and, before the cords were removed, make a dash for liberty.

Probably he would fall dead before he had gone five rods, pierced by their bullets, or would be run down; but it seemed his last, faint hope. It must not be neglected.

Suddenly, however, there was a touch on his left arm and an exclamation of surprise. He opened his eyes and beheld Bounding Bison, who was looking fixedly at his arm.

There, a peculiar figure was visible, worked in India ink, the blue lines showing clearly on the white, firm surface. Time, or something else, had served to slightly lessen the once per-

fect form of the figure, but it was still to be seen that it represented an eagle fluttering in air and seeking to break away from a chain which held it to the ground.

Bounding Bison stared for a while in silence and then turned his gaze on Temple's face.

"What is this?" he asked.

"A figure in India ink," Temple replied.

"But what does it mean?"

"It represents a chained eagle, if that's what you mean."

"But has it no other signification?"

The prisoner was tempted to tell a fabulous story, but, on second thought, he shook his head.

"Not that I am aware of. It was first marked there before I was old enough to remember, and, when ten years ago, I had it renewed in a boyish freak."

"Who first put it there?" persisted the Blackfoot.

"Now you have me; I don't know. I have been a rolling-stone all my life, and what occurred before my own recollections is a sealed book to me. I had no one to tell me. So, of this figure, I can only say—it is there!"

Bounding Bison said no more, but he gave the chained eagle a long and careful survey. Temple watched with interest and curiosity. What meant the Indian's conduct? To him the figure had never been anything more than the result of some one's freak. It was rather unusual to tattoo children at such a tender age, but he had never thought much about it.

Finally the chief raised his head quickly.

"Put on your clothes again; you shall not die yet," he said.

The reprieve was so unexpected that the prisoner could not at once obey. Was it possible he had been saved by the chained eagle?

He was just turning to his garments when several cries of terror arose from the Blackfeet; they shouted violently, muttered something he could not understand, and then, as one man, they rushed for their horses. Even the Bison went, and no one appeared to think of him.

The frightened warriors leaped to their ponies' backs, yelled to them to get their best speed, and went dashing down the valley. Then a clattering from the other point caused Temple to turn.

One glance explained why the Indians had fled.

Another rider was sweeping through the valley, though no horse was between his knees. It was Lightning Bolt and his Giant Elk. Straight down the valley they came, the strange steed going at his usual rapid pace, the strange rider sitting in his place like a statue.

Their course bade fair to bring them within a few feet of Temple, but he did not think of being alarmed. Had time been given him to think clearly, he might even have tried to catch the pair; but as it was not, he looked as he would on any great phenomenon.

On came the elk with tremendous bounds. His head was thrown back, and, for the first time, Temple saw what magnificent antlers he possessed. These, with his large frame, flying feet and limbs, and his graceful movements, made him a creature to attract any one's attention.

And on his back sat Lightning Bolt, as erect as ever, his long beard covering his breast, and his visible attire being the same as on a former occasion—close-fitting cap and a monk-like gown.

And the strange pair were making for Temple without signs either of hostility or fear.

In his preoccupation the young man was not aware that another person was near him. Yet, scarce two paces behind him, an Indian stood in an eager attitude, his gaze fixed on the approaching phenomenon.

To the reader the Indian is no stranger; it was the Mountain Cat, the young Pawnee.

In his hand he held a coiled rope, or, more properly, a lasso, and from the way in which he handled it one could not doubt but he intended to try to lasso the Elk Rider.

Another moment and the crisis came, and as the Giant Elk swept abreast of them, Mountain Cat flung the lasso straight toward Lightning Bolt's head.

If the latter was a human being he must have seen the intention and the attempted execution, but never turned his head in the slightest, and as the lasso fell a foot short of his head, he swept on his way after the Blackfeet, with the old, steady rate of speed.

But Temple wheeled as he saw the lasso, and stood facing the young Indian. Seeing but one man he was about to leap upon him, when Mountain Cat put out his open hands quickly.

"Wait, white man!" he directed, clearly. "Why would you attack me? I am no Blackfoot."

"Hal are you a Pawnee?"

"I am, and my name is Mountain Cat."

"But what brings you to Montana?"

"Perhaps love; perhaps revenge. Do not ask—let it be enough that am here and your friend, because you are the friend of Red Shoulder, whom you call Brown. Wah! the Elk Rider is at work."

Several dull, explosive sounds were heard,

but when Temple turned, he could see neither the Blackfeet nor Lightning Bolt. But it was clear the latter had found the former, and was once more carrying destruction to their band.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHAINED EAGLE.

"QUICK!" said Mountain Cat. "Put on your clothes and come with me. I would give much to capture the Elk Rider, and we may get a chance while—"

He paused suddenly, and remained staring blankly at Temple.

"Well, what now?" the latter demanded.

He had once decided that he had found a friend in the Mountain Cat, and he remembered that Beriah Brown had vaguely hinted that there "was at least one decent Indian in Montana," but he began to fear the young brave had suddenly become possessed of anthropological tendencies.

"It is the flying eagle!" muttered the Pawnee.

Temple started. Until that day the mark had never caused more than a ripple in his life. Now, twice within an hour, he saw it surprise men in an unaccountable way. Was it possible that he was a long-lost Indian prince, changed in his cradle for a low-born white infant? The mute question hit him so profoundly he almost expected to turn a copper color.

"Yes, it's the chained eagle," he nonchalantly said, but his gaze was fixed keenly on Mountain Cat.

The Pawnee laid one hand on the figure.

"Who is my brother, that he bears that mark?" he asked, his voice unusually gentle for one of his race.

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Yet, you recognize the chained eagle."

The Pawnee's expression changed and he did not reply at once.

"It is a strange device," he finally said.

"Where have you seen it before?"

"Never," answered the Indian, steadily.

"I beg your pardon, but you have!"

"Is Mountain Cat on old man that he cannot remember?"

Temple laughed.

"No, you are not. On the contrary, you do remember well. You betrayed your acquaintance with the chained eagle the moment you saw it. Come, Pawnee, you claim to be my friend; prove it by no longer hesitating over this matter. What do you know of the chained eagle?"

"Once," answered Mountain Cat, "I was crossing the prairie in my own country when I found a dead man with his arm thus marked. The figure was so strange I have never forgotten and, seeing the arm of my brother, it recalled that day."

Temple knew his companion was lying. Somehow, this art did not come easy to the Pawnee; he betrayed want of veracity plainly. Despite this, however, Temple had taken a fancy to him and he resolved to accept the explanation and, working into the other's confidence anon, learn more.

So he stooped and hastily donned his discarded clothing.

"I am now ready to follow Lightning Bolt," he said.

"Guess we see nuffin' now," answered the young Indian, falling into broken English. "All still; Elk Rider and Blackfeet gone fore now."

"Let us try, at any rate," replied Temple.

His own weapons lay near at hand, discarded by the Indians in their hasty flight, and he put all in place before starting. They went with Mountain Cat in advance, his keen gaze fixed on the trail; though often raised for some sign.

Not far had they to go. Rounding a little knoll they saw a level space and, in the midst of it, two motionless forms with dusky skins and stripes of gaudy paint. They were followers of Bounding Bison, but it was clear they would never go on the trail again.

The living Blackfeet, as well as their relentless pursuer, had disappeared from view.

"No use try ketch Elk Rider dis time," said Mountain Cat, disappointment expressed on his face. "Mebbe be two miles away; Giant Elk go like wind. Me sorry; me like ketch him."

"I can most sincerely say the same, but though we may not do that, we can at least examine the men he has killed and see what marks he leaves upon them. All the hunters of my own color around here say he is a spirit. I think the idea nonsense and now intend to prove it."

He strode forward, followed by the Pawnee. The latter favored an investigation but was willing his companion should take the lead.

The Blackfeet lay where they had stopped after falling from their horses and were quite dead. Their faces wore a look of terror which even death had not effaced. Had they fallen in battle with a foe they knew to be human the expression would have been of ferocious courage, but Lightning Bolt struck terror to their souls as well as death to their bodies.

Temple bent over the nearest. A little stream of blood was trickling down his neck, and when it was wiped away they saw on each side a small red hole, much like the track of a bullet.

"Some missile has gone straight through him," said Temple. "He died quickly, considering where he was hit, but internal hemorrhage may have done it."

A search for further wounds proved unavailing.

They turned to the second man.

An almost precisely similar experience awaited them. He, too, had been shot through the neck and the wound was his sole one.

Waldo Temple was surprised. He knew that Lightning Bolt dealt death with some sort of an explosive missile. Ignorant people said it was a veritable fragment of lightning, a bolt manufactured by supernatural means. Discarding their exaggerated views, and considering his own intelligent one that it was of the same nature as a hand-grenade, or shell, it seemed an almost incredible coincidence that both Blackfeet should have died in exactly the same way; with only one wound, and that in the same place with both.

For a moment the young man was staggered, but common-sense triumphed in the end.

Mountain Cat had watched him closely. As the Pawnee had said to Beriah Brown, he had been wavering between the superstitions of his own people and the teachings of the whites, and on this occasion he was waiting for Waldo's verdict with undisguised impatience.

"What think?" he asked.

"About what?"

"Elk Rider. Is he man or debbil?"

"A man, rest assured. As such he is a remarkable character, surpassing anything I ever knew before; but it is nonsense to suppose him a spirit. There are no such things."

The Pawnee nodded quickly.

"Good, much good. Udder white men tell me so, but me not sure. Dis strange; much strange. Me nebber saw elk go so fast before; nebber saw man ride elk before. Me git 'most scared, sometimes, but try to be brave. What these things Elk Rider use?"

Temple explained his views as well as he could and Mountain Cat listened and nodded. They did not remain a great while where they were, for the Blackfeet might return to look for their dead. At this thought another arose; at the rate Lightning Bolt was killing off the men of the band, how long would it last?

"The sooner they go, the better," said the Pawnee, as Temple asked the question aloud, as they walked away. "Bounding Bison and his men are dogs; I know them better than you."

"The Bison claims they are the bravest of his nation."

Mountain Cat made a disdainful gesture.

"They are what white men call the 'scum' of the Blackfeet. All nations have men who are not worthy of honors, and of such material is the Bison's band. He collected thieves and murderers, plotters, schemers, and traitors, and formed them together. They are wholly separate from the real Blackfeet, and will never be received back. But it answers Bounding Bison's purpose well; all is as he could wish were it not for the Elk Rider."

"I saw that you tried to lasso the latter."

"Ugh!"

"If he kills only Blackfeet—and he surely let us alone—why would you harm him?"

"Did White Arm see me try to harm him? No. I would not fire at him if I had the chance, but, like all other men, I am anxious to know what he is."

"Enough so to hunt for him?" Temple eagerly asked.

"Yes, White Arm."

"And will you join hands with me in the work?"

"I will."

They clasped hands and the compact was formed, for weal or woe. Neither suspected what strange and startling results would spring from their efforts; neither suspected the tragedies the future had in store for all who figured in and around Quartz Rock.

Temple was pleased with his new alliance, for each additional moment spent in the Pawnee's company served to increase the fancy he had at the very first taken to him, and as he seemed to be a bold young fellow, he might prove to be a very useful friend to have.

But Temple did not forget one matter that was near his heart.

"Before we part, Mountain Cat," he said, as they paused near the village to say good-by, "I have a question to ask."

"I will listen, White Arm."

"What do you know about the figure on my arm—the chained eagle?"

The Pawnee's gaze fell.

"Has my brother not heard me tell?"

"Yes," said Temple, kindly; "but I think you will admit the story you told was not a true one."

The young Indian did not look offended.

"Mountain Cat can say no more. He does not know how the figure was put on your arm."

"But you have seen it elsewhere,"

The Indian remained silent.
"Come, Pawnee, if we are to be brothers we should deal frankly with each other. Tell me this as a great favor."

The youth laid his hand on Temple's arm.
"Listen, White Arm," he said. "If I should tell you where I have seen the mark before today I am sure it would do you no good, and it might do me great harm. The Pawnee has traveled far, and for a fixed purpose. Do not stop him until that purpose is accomplished. Some day he will speak freely, but a solemn promise now holds him silent. Do not ask again."

The manner of the speaker was such that Temple decided to obey.
"It shall be as you say, but you must remember we are now allies."

"The Mountain Cat will not forget. White Arm is his brother, and it is not in a Pawnee's nature to be false. One thing let me say to my white brother."

"What is that?"
"Beware of the white chief, Leonard. He has spoken fair words to you, but I doubt if his heart is as fair. He is ten times worse than Bounding Bison, and since he has acted as he has, White Arm may be sure he has some secret motive. It is not his way to invite strangers to his house. Do not forget what I say, brother—beware of Leonard!"

The Pawnee spoke with an earnestness which proved his sincerity, and Temple readily promised. They parted then, and the latter went on to the village. He believed he knew why Isaac Leonard was kind to him; the manner of Agnes had revealed the truth; but the question arose: If Leonard wished him, an entire stranger, for a son-in-law, what was the reason?

"The Mountain Cat's warning is worthy of notice, and I will not forget. Quartz Rock has a bad reputation at the best, and it behooves me to keep my eyes open while here. There's no knowing what is below the surface."

CHAPTER XVI.

JACK PURCELL'S WOOING.

MISSOURI was so tired by her protracted labor and presence at the ferry that, after the rush was over that day, she resolved to retire to her humble lodging and let the two negroes operate the Brown Hand alone for the rest of the evening. If any trouble occurred, they could quickly inform her.

The girl had a room at the house of a settler named Pumphrey, a humble but honorable man, and whose wife had done a good deal to make Missouri less friendless than she would otherwise have been.

On arriving at the house she found all the other people away, but soon after she entered there was a sound at the door, followed by the peculiar knock which was the signal of her friends.

She opened the door without a suspicion that trouble was in store for her, but as it swung open she saw, not one of the Pumphreys, but Jack Purcell!

He entered before she could decide whether or not to close the door in his face.

"Good-evening, Miss Soo," he said blandly. "I was passing, and I thought I would drop in for a moment."

"Mr. Pumphrey is not at home," she said significantly.

"I am aware of that fact, but as I did not wish to see him it makes no material difference. Pardon me, Soo, but the sitting-room looks so inviting I will walk in."

He did so without further ceremony, and she was obliged to follow him.

She cordially disliked the man, knowing he was a blackleg and gambler, but she had to endure his presence then.

"I wish to congratulate you on your success in holding the ferry," he continued, as she sat down.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You have proved yourself quite a Napoleon, and I suppose Leonard is tearing out his hair by handfuls. But don't you know he will get the best of it in the end?"

"That is not settled, as yet."

"But just think of the power against you."

"I mentioned that to you the other day," Missouri could not help saying. "I told you I understood the plot, and that you had secured the aid of Leonard to conquer me."

"Really, Soo, this is too bad!" Purcell expostulated.

"Just my opinion. A man who would make war on a woman seems to me very contemptible indeed!"

"And what of a woman who accuses one who would be her friend, of base crimes?"

"When I have heard of such a case I will give an opinion," the girl quietly answered.

Purcell tried to assume a gloomy look.

"You persist in wronging me, Soo. I don't know why you should, for I have tried to always please you. Is it my fault that I love you? No; such things are beyond our control, as much as is the shifting of the wind. Blame your own beauty and noble nature rather than me."

"That sounds very romantic; but I don't

know why you should try to blind my eyes, Mr. Purcell. It is well known here that you flourished for years in St. Louis as a gambler, and only left there when it was perilous to stay longer. I once heard you boast that you 'killed your man' before you reached your twentieth year. In the face of all this you try to convince me you are an honorable man. It won't work, sir!"

"What do you expect in the West? The effeminate and weakened East may ape the airs of saints; but here we are men. You can't find a more desirable husband than I, if I do say it."

"Thank you; but I am not looking for a husband."

"Do you aspire to be an old maid?"

"My hopes and plans are my own, Mr. Purcell, and I will not try to explain them."

Her calm indifference made him flush angrily, but he curbed his passion.

"Now, look here, Missouri, listen to reason. I am not half so bad a fellow as you would make out. Perhaps I have not always done just right, but my heart is all right, and all I need is a good, true wife to help me improve—to reform, if you like the word better."

"I am not in the missionary business."

"Other women are doing the same thing every day; they are willing to help a man improve."

"The more fools, they. A woman might as well swallow poison, hoping it will turn to sugar, as to marry a man thinking to reform him. Possibly when you have reformed you may go where you are not known and find a wife. You have my permission."

Purcell bit his lips to keep back his anger.

"There is one thing more, Soo. You know as well as I do that you will ultimately be beaten in the fight for the Brown Hand. The moment Isaac Leonard sees fit to go into the game in earnest your last hope is gone. He has all Quartz Rock behind him; you have only your two negroes. Wait! hear me through! Now, as I have said before, I have influence with Mike Mulloy, and will make him withdraw his claim, and I also stand well with Leonard and can make him forgive what has happened. All this on condition that you become my wife."

"I will not put you to so much trouble," Missouri replied, promptly.

"Think again—"

"It is unnecessary, Mr. Purcell. The matter is one to be settled without grave deliberation. I am surprised that you have the audacity to mention it. I have three times declined to marry you, before this, and you ought to begin to understand me. I am tired of it, and tired of you. Mr. Purcell, I don't wish to be harsh, but if you was the last man in the world I would not marry you!"

There was no mistaking the fact that she was very much in earnest, and an ugly gleam shot into the gambler's eyes.

"You will be sorry of this!" he cried, hotly.

"What do you mean?"

"I can hate, as well as love, and I will yet bring you to my feet."

"Thank you, but I take my pick when I kneel to men."

"Girl, I warn you, be careful. I will not be responsible for the result if you aggravate me further."

"Leave the house and you will have no trouble."

Purcell reached forward and caught her arm.

"If you value your future say no more!" he hissed. "I do not claim to be an angel, and I may do that which—"

Just then a hand fell on his own shoulder, with a force not to be resisted, and he was whirled around and forcibly seated in a chair.

"There are two opinions about that!" said a stern voice.

He looked up and saw Waldo Temple.

A furious gleam leaped into the gambler's eyes and his hand sought a pocket where nestled a revolver. But he had to deal with a man as prompt as he, and the new-comer drew ahead of him.

"Keep your hands where they belong! I have no desire to proceed to extremities, but self-preservation is the first law of nature."

The lamp-light sent out little gleams of silver from the polished barrel and Purcell thought better of his warlike move. Controlling himself by a great effort he kept his seat, but there was a most vicious gleam in his eyes.

"What business have you to meddle here?" he demanded.

"I reserve the right to put my heel on a serpent when I see one," Temple calmly answered.

"It will be death for you to try it with me."

"You are a cowardly bound, at the best. No other species of mankind would lay his hand on a woman in anger."

"That's all very well, and fine talk, but I tell you I will not bear interference. I know you, and the end is not yet. Before I am done with you, you will howl like a calf!"

"I am at your service at any time, and when you start a butcher-shop, let me know and I'll be around at your opening. But, John Purcell, I warn you, be a little careful. I feel amply able to care for myself, and when dealing with a man like you I shall not hesitate."

"You've both had your say," interrupted Missouri, "and now, Mr. Purcell, you will oblige me by taking your leave."

"Oh! you don't banish Temple, I see."

"No, sir," the girl calmly replied.

"Well, I shall not go until he does, for I want to see him outside," Purcell belligerently observed.

"I am at your service almost any time, but, just now—Miss Missouri, do you wish him to go?"

"Yes."

"Then, Purcell, be so good as to walk out!"

"I will not, and it will take six like you to put me out!"

The defiance was barely out of his mouth when Temple sprung forward and seized him. The gambler went into the struggle with a vim and plenty of confidence; but, very much to his surprise, he was conveyed to the door and shoved out in a very brief space of time. His muscular ability had been found inadequate to the requirements of the occasion.

Temple took the liberty of barring the door with himself on the inside, and then turned to the girl with a smile.

"Do not feel any alarm, Miss Missouri—" he began; but she interrupted him.

"Oh! I am not at all alarmed," she said, steadily. "If I had let such things trouble me I should not have held the ferry as long as I have. At the same time, Mr. Temple, I thank you for ridding me of the presence of that man. I could have kept him away, for I had a revolver; but I hardly possess the strength to put him out as you did."

She laughed lightly, and Temple could not help admiring such unexpected courage.

"I hope my entrance will not be considered too bold," he said; "but I came here to make a call, and hearing Purcell's angry voice, took the liberty of walking in without ceremony."

"I certainly shall not reprimand you, since you have been so useful; I am glad you came. But Mr. Pumphrey is not at home."

"I did not come to see him."

"Who was it, then?" she bluntly asked.

"Yourself."

"You came to see me?"

"Yes. Now, I beg that you won't class me as another visitor of the Purcell class, for I shall go out whenever you say so; but I have become interested in the Brown Hand case, and wish to know if I can be of any service to you."

CHAPTER XVII.

MISSOURI'S CHAMPION.

THE face of the girl became graver. The offer was made in a way which pleased her, and she did not feel like refusing any assistance offered by those who were plainly desirable friends. Still, she knew better what might be the result than Temple did.

"I appreciate your kindness, but you cannot be aware of the danger to which it will subject you. I have once, already, warned you that Quartz Rock is not a safe place, and you said Gaffer Golightly had also warned you. Believe me, Gaffer is not one to exaggerate, and you must have a faint idea what you risk even by remaining in town."

"He has told me all this, but—"

"But by appearing as my friend you will make your danger treble what it already is. As you know, Isaac Leonard has formally declared war against me, and his word is law in Quartz Rock—except to me. Beware of him!"

"Do you suppose the possibility of danger will make me leave a girl to fight her battles alone?"

"It had better do so."

"Well, it will not. You have proved your courage by facing the lordly Leonard alone; I will prove mine, if proof it be, by coming to your aid. Do not discard any friends who offer their services. Now, I know Gaffer Golightly, Beriah Brown and myself stand ready to help you, and we are better than no friends at all."

Missouri was not sorry that he persisted in his offer, for, if she had confessed the truth, she was beginning to be somewhat interested in this young man who was so different from the average inhabitants of Quartz Rock. But she made no such confession and, of the two, rather gave Temple the impression that she regarded him with utter indifference.

He was not discouraged, however, and as his admiration for her steadily increased he resolved to continue the acquaintance he had at last succeeded in placing on a friendly basis.

He left without any definite plans being arranged for the future, and something impelled him to walk down to the ferry. He did not see the lights, as usual, but it was not until he saw the vacant boats rocking by the side of the pier that he comprehended it was past nine and that trade had ceased for the night.

From there he wandered down toward the canyon through which the water of the pond discharged itself. Standing at the top of the raceway, he looked down at the water below.

As has before been stated, the river at this point was of such a nature that no boat could live in it, while fording was equally out of the question. After leaving the pond the water dashed through a comparatively narrow chan-

nel, where the river-bed descended rapidly, and the water was churned to a foam on ragged rocks.

In the darkness Temple could see but little of it, but its roar told that it was as active as ever.

From there he turned back toward the pond, intending to return to The Hearthstone and relieve whatever anxiety Gaffer might be feeling concerning him.

He had not gone many yards, however, before he abruptly paused. He had seen a boat upon the pond. The fact was enough to arrest his attention, for he knew there were no boats near Quartz Rock except those operated by Missouri and her negroes, and as he had just seen both of them resting at the pier he wondered what had called them out.

As he looked more closely the craft swung idly around, revealing the fact that it was unguided, and he also failed to perceive an occupant.

Close behind it was the larger boat, and both were going in the same eccentric way.

Temple crouched close to the bank and watched further developments. Clearly, there was something about the matter he did not understand, and he meant to see it out. Had Missouri's enemies stolen the crafts? If so, it was not to be wondered at if she had left no guard.

As they drifted on they naturally moved toward him, as he was at the lower side of the pond, and at one time they seemed likely to come ashore; but as they neared the canyon the more rapid water caught them and they went faster.

Suddenly, Temple arose to his feet. In a very short time the boats would reach the rapid current which went on to the canyon, and if they once entered there they would only come out in splinters; and as he saw their probable fate it also flashed upon him that all this had been planned; that the girl's enemies had set them afloat with the deliberate intention of destroying them.

As this suspicion occurred to him, the young man dropped his rifle and cast off his outer garments. He was resolved that at least one of them should be saved. He dropped into the water and swam toward them with hasty strokes.

As he had thought, they were wholly empty, and as he laid his hand on the smaller one it yielded to his strength without trouble.

Had he then made for the shore all would have been well, but the larger one swung into his reach and he could not resist the temptation to seize that, also. A portion of the painter of each was still in place, and he fastened them together and turned toward the shore.

He had waited too long, however, as he was quickly shown, for when he tried to strike out for land the rapid water beat upon him and then, striking the boats, sent them against him with surprising force.

For a moment his right arm was impeded in its action, and by the time he had cleared it he was dangerously near the mouth of the raceway. From a point several feet back of the rocks the water seemed drawn by gigantic force and he was in the rapid rush.

To go down the canyon meant sure death.

For a moment he struck out lustily, but his efforts proved fruitless and he saw he must either abandon the boats or go with them in the race of destruction. He tried to free himself, but the painters clung to his arms like a spider's web to an ensnared fly; in some way he had become entangled in them.

Genuine apprehension then seized him and he struggled desperately to break the ropes. The roar of the rushing waters grew louder and he almost fancied giant hands were about his waist and dragging him down to doom.

His knife had been left on the bank, and the painters proved too strong to be broken. It looked as though he must inevitably go down the raceway—to death.

But just as he was on the point of trying to enter one of the boats a shout from the bank reached his ears. He looked up quickly. A human form was dimly visible a few yards away, and he saw an arm flung aloft.

"Catch, White Arm, catch!" cried a clear voice, and something like a serpent fell upon his head.

He recognized the touch of a lasso and, stirred to fresh energy, he moved like a flash. Throwing up his arms he dropped the noose over them and then caught at the line beyond.

"Pull!" he exclaimed.

It was none too soon, for man and boats had reached a point where, had it not been for the lasso, they would have shot down the canyon like a flash; and even as it was the resistance nearly took the lasso-holder off his feet. But he was plucky and, getting his shoulder against a rock, he began hauling in hand over hand, aided by Temple's lusty strokes.

Even then the result seemed doubtful for awhile, for the boats were a terrible drag, but the battle was fought to a silent and successful finish; the rapid current was passed, and, accepting the hand of his rescuer, Temple raised himself to firm land and then dropped down wholly exhausted.

His companion drew the boats well up before he spoke a single word. Temple had recognized

the Mountain Cat, but he lacked breath to say anything for awhile.

The Pawnee waited patiently and Temple finally arose to a sitting position.

"I owe you another debt, Mountain Cat."

"Brothers can never owe each other anything. What is done with the heart is above price. The Pawnee has put his hand in that of White Arm, and from the time he did it he was ready to work or fight for him. It is well for my brother, though, that I was here. The Devil's Mill would have ground him in pieces."

"You give it an appropriate name, but you do all things well. Take my hand and my earnest thanks. Now, since many words are not necessary between us, let me ask if you saw how I happened to be in such trouble."

The Pawnee did not know; he had not arrived until the struggle was well under way; and Waldo told all and then asked the Indian's opinion. The latter looked at the loose ends of the painters.

"Cut wid knife," he said, resuming his broken English.

"By whom?"

"Who would want the boats to be crushed to pieces in the Devil's Mill?"

"Your question covers the whole ground. The hand of Isaac Leonard is visible in this. Failing to beat Missouri at a game of wits, he took this way to get rid of her boats. Thanks to us, his scheme has failed."

"Did I not tell White Arm that Leonard was all bad?"

"You did, and I know you spoke well. He is a coward who will war on a woman."

"Leonard bes' look out; some day he find Mountain Cat around and he get hurt!"

The hand of the Pawnee worked on his knife-hilt in a way which spoke plainer than words, but as neither men cared to tarry there they took the boats back to the pier. Two discoveries were then made. The half of the painter left fastened to the pier had been so worked over with a stone, or otherwise, that it seemed to have been chafed asunder, rather than to have been cut, as the other half showed it had been.

Secondly, they found T. Jeff Adams asleep not far away. He had been posted to watch the ferry, but had fallen asleep on duty. When he knew what had happened he was so sincerely sorry and chagrined that Temple forbore uttering any reproach.

The Mountain Cat had other work on hand, so they did not remain long at the ferry.

Temple walked toward the hotel, his thoughts always dwelling on Missouri. His interest in the girl deepened with each passing moment and he was anxious to aid her, but he knew a bitter fight lay in the near future if she persisted to hold to the Brown Hand Ferry.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

WHEN Jack Purcell found himself thrown out of doors so unceremoniously, his wrath arose to a boiling pitch. He had no sense of honor to temper his passions, and had opportunity offered he would have shot Temple inside the door. Luckily, however, the door had been barred upon him and his inclination could not be carried out.

Rapidly, however, his fertile brain sought for other means of revenge.

"I'll go to Leonard and let him and his daughter know what is going on here," he muttered, darkly. "The fair Agnes will be raving as soon as she hears it, and if I could touch Isaac as truly this tangle might be straightened out. Confound it! I am tempted to break loose from Leonard and paddle my own canoe. Why he is so anxious to marry his girl to Temple I don't see; it would be more sensible to sink the latter in the river and compel Soo to marry me. I'll give my allies one more chance, and if they don't show some sense I'll strike out for myself. Soo shall become my wife or I'll—"

He stopped muttering, but there was little chance to wonder what was in his heart; it was the shadow of the darkest crime known to man since the days of Cain.

All this time he had been striding toward Leonard's, and when he reached the door he knocked in a way which brought a speedy answer. He asked for the master of the house. He was not in. Next he asked for Agnes, and was speedily conducted to her presence.

One look at his face was enough to show her he was in a passion, but as she did not happen to think of her rival she kept her seat and looked at him with cold surprise.

"I have news for you," he said, abruptly.

"News? Well, what is it?"

"Temple is with Missouri!"

The iceberg became a volcano in an instant; she quickly arose to her feet.

"What! has he dared— That is, are you sure he is there?"

"I have the best of evidence; he has just thrown me out. I chanced to be visiting her, myself, when he arrived, and as I was not wanted as a witness to their love-making I was invited to leave. I declined and Temple threw me out!"

The confession was a humiliating one for a

lover to make, but Purcell was reckless in his desire to stir Miss Leonard to his own pitch of fury. And he succeeded very well.

"And they are now there together?"

"Yes."

"I will kill her!" said the jealous woman, sibilantly.

"No, no; better kill him."

"The man who touches him is doomed. John Purcell, you and I understand each other, and may as well speak plainly. Waldo Temple shall be my husband though a score of Missouris stand in the way, but not a hand shall touch him. Mark this down, and beware how you plot against him!"

"Very good; and, in return, beware how you plot against her. I am a useful man here in Quartz Rock, and I must be allowed my way in one matter—Missouri is to be my wife!"

They looked at each other belligerently for a moment; but Agnes had all of her father's diplomatic tact—though not the coolness of mature years—and she suddenly reached out her hand.

"So be it, sir, and we will work to one end; but separate them we must."

"I see no way to do it peaceably."

"Men never do; only women are fitted for that. As the first step we will go at once to Pumphrey's house."

She hurried away to get her outer garments, while Purcell stood troubled and uncertain. His blood had begun to cool, and he feared they would only make matters worse by the proposed course. But all Quartz Rock knew Agnes Leonard was not to be crossed in her plans.

She soon reappeared, and they went out together. Jack moved as slowly as possible, hoping Leonard would appear, but that gentleman had been to oversee the work of setting the boats adrift, and did not return in time. The delay however, was sufficient, so that when they reached the cabin, Temple was gone.

Purcell explained the peculiar knock, which was the signal of the Pumphrey family, and Agnes at once announced that she was going in. He tried to change her purpose, but he once more found that she was sure to have her own way when she saw fit.

The knock was tried, and once more Missouri appeared at the door. Purcell had stepped back into the shadow, and the ferry-girl, seeing only Miss Leonard, stood in amazement. Never before had that august lady deigned to honor the house with her presence.

Agnes did not wait for an invitation, but promptly crossed the threshold. By so doing, she gained a view of the interior of the front room, and as she did not see Temple, she leaped to the conclusion he was in hiding.

Missouri, surprised but self-possessed, was rebarring the door. So far not a word had been spoken by either, but the ferry-girl detected an approaching storm in her rival's face.

The latter walked into the front room, and directed a sharp glance under the table, as though Temple might be there. Under any other circumstance, it would have been ridiculous.

As Missouri entered, she wheeled upon her belligerently.

"Where have you hidden your lover, girl?"

It was an unexpected question, and Missouri could not avoid an increase of color in her face; but it was that of indignation, not conscious guilt.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Leonard, but I do not understand you," she quietly said.

"Your blush betrays you; besides, I am not dealing in surmises. You poise before Quartz Rock as an immaculate statue, but do not flatter yourself every one is deceived. Where is Waldo Temple?"

"Not being his keeper, I cannot say, Miss Leonard. He is not here."

"It is false!" said the imperious beauty, stamping her foot. "You cannot deceive me, nor shall you deceive him. You have lured him into your net with your siren arts, but you shall not triumph."

We have already seen that Missouri was not lacking in spirit, and she may be excused for sarcastically replying:

"When I see him I will notify him that his guardian wishes to see him."

"How dare you!" cried Miss Leonard, angrily. "It is well for you I have no whip here!"

"I am in no way interested in your whip, but if you wish to get it, you are at liberty to leave here as soon as you see fit."

"You cannot get rid of me so easily. I have come to confound you in your plots, and tell Mr. Temple just what you are. I suppose you have hidden him beyond the sound of my voice, but I command you call him here. I will not have him deceived."

"If he is so much to you, you should know where he now is; I certainly do not. He is not in this house."

"How dare you deny it! He was seen here by—"

"By John Purcell. You need not pause so abruptly, Miss Leonard, for I can surmise the source of your information. The man I have

mentioned did see Mr. Temple here; he came to my rescue when Purcell forgot his manhood; but he went away before you came."

There was something in her calm straightforwardness which convinced even Agnes that she spoke the truth, and a slight flush arose to her cheeks as she realized how she had erred in her judgment and made herself ridiculous.

But this only increased her enmity toward Missouri.

"This is no excuse for you, miss. I have heard of your prolonged flirtation with Mr. Temple, and I wish to notify you it must be stopped. How dare you aspire to his love? He is a man of wealth, education and refinement; you—what are you?"

Words can ill express the unjust scorn and bitterness of the question, but Missouri remained calm.

"I will tell you, Miss Leonard. I am a humble girl, who aspires to be no more than she now is. There is no reason why you should let jealousy run away with your reason, for Mr. Temple is no more than a friend to me—and never will be."

"It is false; you are trying to entrap him."

"You are mistaken, Miss Leonard."

"Have I no eyes?"

"I begin to think you have not."

"But I assure you I have, and I understand you perfectly."

"It is immaterial whether you do or not, but as I have nothing more to say on this subject, I must ask you to address your future conversation to Mr. Temple, himself. I do not care to hear it."

Once more Agnes lost all prudence in her unreasoning passion, and she swept forward and caught Missouri by the arm. As she did so a knife flashed in her hand and there was a murderous expression on her face.

"Swear never to speak to Waldo Temple again, or I will sweep you from my path as I would a rattlesnake!" she cried, in a hissing voice.

Missouri attempted to spring backward, but the jealous woman's hold was one of steel, and the attempt was a failure. And the knife quivered in the air as though about to descend.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISSOURI MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

BEFORE Agnes could execute what seemed to be her deadly intention, she found her wrist seized in a grasp even more powerful than her own, and as Missouri, by a second effort, wrenched away, the beauty wheeled to see who had dared interfere between her and her marked prey.

She saw and then started back with a startled cry.

Before her stood a tall and powerful Indian, not one of the degraded wretches seen around border towns in so many places, nor yet a painted cut-throat, but one who had left his color as it was made, and who seemed like a red Saul of the West.

But the fact that his face was noble and lofty did not give courage to Agnes. Although well aware that Bounding Bison and his men were but tools of her father, she had always feared them as she feared no white man. To her, an Indian was but a brute in human form ever thirsting for human blood.

Now, she did not doubt but this man was a Blackfoot, but she cried out with fear, nevertheless.

The Indian's nostrils dilated with scorn.

"The white squaw is a craven," he said, in a sonorous voice. "She was full of battle-fire when facing one of her own sex, with the advantage in her favor, but she cries like the white man's pappoose when danger menaces her."

"Let me go!" implored Agnes, with a shiver. "I am the daughter of Isaac Leonard; let me go!"

The Indian made a disdainful gesture.

"The name of Leonard is not so powerful here as the white squaw thinks. The Mountain Cat despises and defies the pale-face chief—go, you, and tell him so. You, his daughter, are as like him as the young wolf is like its parent, but you cannot frighten an Indian with your frown."

"I am not frowning; I am your friend, Blackfoot. Have I ever done harm to any of Bounding Bison's band?"

Something like a smile moved the Indian's face. He did not see fit to announce that he was not a Blackfoot, but the evident fear of the proud beauty was pleasant to him.

"The eagle cares little for the love or hate of the owl," he answered. "Do not seek for means to pacify me, for the Mountain Cat does not war on women. What he has to ask is, how dares Leonard's daughter draw a knife on the other white girl?"

"She is my enemy," muttered Agnes.

"You seek to make her one. I have heard the talk between you and know that the ferry-girl met your bitter words with gentle ones. It is you who are base and hot-tempered. You should learn stoicism of the despised red-men. Perhaps the Mountain Cat could teach you in his home among the crags."

He bent a keen glance upon her, and then his lips again parted as she shrunk away with a gasp of alarm. What he said had taken effect, but the Pawnee no more desired Agnes for a squaw than did he wish for Leonard's friendship. He hated the white captain with all the ardor of his nature, and Agnes came in for her share, but, as he had said, he did not war on women.

Missouri, however, advanced to his side.

"Think again, Indian," she said. "The eagle does not woo the dove and white girl would be out of place in your home among the crags. Seek one of your own race and it will be better for you in the end."

"Girl of the ferry, why do you speak for your enemy?"

"She is a woman, like myself."

"Say no more. You have also likened her to a dove, when I should call her a hawk; your judgment seems warped, but your heart is good. Have no fear; the white girl is fair, but she does not please Mountain Cat's eye. Go!—I have seen enough of you!"

He tossed Agnes's hand scornfully away, and that young woman, with reviving courage, was about to try and impress Missouri anew when the Pawnee wheeled like a flash and bounded across the room.

He disappeared behind a lounge, and both girls stood in mute surprise as the sounds of a struggle reached their ears. Then the Indian reappeared, dragging a man after him, and they looked on the passion-convulsed face of Jack Purcell.

Mountain Cat cast him into the middle of the room, and then stood looking at him with a scornful smile.

"Curse you! I will have your life for that!" said the gambler, but his voice lacked the force which makes a threat impressive.

Despite his attempt at bravado, it was clear he was afraid of the man whose strength had just been shown.

"Men who creep along the floor like a serpent and hide behind furniture are not dangerous," said the Pawnee, steadily. "You are here to be looked at, not to act the part of an avenger."

"My turn will yet come."

"Are you not satisfied? Rise, if you wish, and vengeance shall be yours, if you can win it."

Purcell did rise, but no warlike passion was in his heart. He knew he would be a child in the hands of this strong-limbed red-man, and had no ambition to fight.

"You have returned in a very honorable way, Mr. Purcell," said Missouri, sarcastically. "Do you always crawl in through the window when refused the use of the door?"

"The Blackfoot entered the same way," retorted Agnes.

"We are not speaking of the Blackfoot, but of your friend, Mr. Purcell. I trust he will do his business here, and then go."

"I have nothing to say," sullenly muttered the gambler. "Explanations are unnecessary. If you are satisfied with my humiliation, I will go."

"We may as well," added Agnes, "and leave this girl with her new lover."

She was sorry for the sneer when the Mountain Cat moved forward and laid his hand on her arm. All her fear of the race to which he belonged returned, and she would have fled had the way of retreat been open.

"Look you, white girl," said he in a deep voice; "it is not wise to anger the grizzly bear. Be satisfied if he is willing to go on his way and not look at you. Beware what you say and do! I know you well. You come of a bad stock, and you are like your fathers. You are plotting dark plots here in Quartz Rock—beware that they do not recoil upon you. Above all, let this girl alone. You hate her, but it will not be wise to strike in the dark. Mountain Cat is her friend, and he will defend her. Now, go!"

He tossed her arm aside, and she was so chilled by what she thought his terrible manner that she turned and made for the door without another word.

Purcell followed, looking back with a scowl; but the Pawnee, standing upright, met his gaze with one Jack did not care to see explained.

Mountain Cat closed the door behind them and then turned again to Missouri.

"I have but a moment to stay, but I would speak a word to my white sister before I go. Does she clearly understand those people who have just gone?"

"I know they are my bitter enemies," answered the ferry-girl.

She met Mountain Cat's gaze unwaveringly, for something told her it would be no mistake to trust him.

"Good! Do not forget that, for you will hear of them again. You have a hard battle to fight if you face both them and Isaac Leonard, and only by always watching can you save yourself. If I can ever help you I will, for I am the friend of White Arm, whom you call Temple. He has told me of you, and that is why I chanced to be near to-night. I hope I am not blamed for entering as I did, but I

heard loud voices and the window was convenient."

"I certainly cannot blame you, but I am surprised that one of Bounding Bison's men should raise his hand against Isaac Leonard's daughter."

The Pawnee made a quick gesture.

"I am not one of Bounding Bison's band; I am his deadly enemy. Ask Temple; he will tell you it is so. Temple is a good man, and if my white sister is in trouble she had better apply to him. And what Mountain Cat can do shall be done."

Missouri was not so ready to decline help as he had been before she clearly saw how bitter the warfare started by her enemies was likely to become, and as the young Indian seemed noble and chivalrous she said she would be glad to consider him her friend.

He said nothing of the narrow escape of her boats, for he knew T. Jeff Adams would watch faithfully the rest of the night, and in the morning Temple would see her and tell the story; but left the house just in time to avoid the Pumphreys, who were returning.

The Pawnee sought the higher ground and then, pausing, looked down upon the village. Nearly all the lights had been extinguished and the place was silent. If he could have had his way he would have seen the place a ruin the following morning. True, his vendetta was against Leonard, but nearly all these people were his abject tools.

Mountain Cat hated them all.

He turned away after a brief survey and resumed his journey. The way was wild and rocky, and he passed through deep canyons and along the edge of precipices where a fall would have dashed him to pieces on jagged rocks hundreds of feet below.

He was traversing one of the canyons when a slight sound caused him to look upward. What he saw held him spell-bound. Fifty yards above he distinguished the form of a gigantic elk outlined against the sky like a black figure on a field of gray.

Few animals of the species were there in the mountains of that size, and a quick suspicion flashed upon him. Was it the elk steed of Lightning Bolt?

If so, the rider was missing, for the animal appeared wholly alone. It stood on the very verge of the cliff, almost as motionless as a statue, its massive body, strong limbs and huge antlers showing as though sculptured from the rock itself.

Once, Mountain Cat half-raised his rifle, but he quickly lowered it again. Such a target was a tempting one, but if it was the Giant Elk itself, he had no desire to do it harm. He resolved to test the question, and looked for a spot to ascend the face of the cliff.

It was not until he had gone a hundred yards that he found a sloping place, but once there he began to climb resolutely. Few men would have cared to take the risk, even there. In many places only the grasp of his hands on a point of rock prevented him from falling, and such a thing meant death.

But the Indian was brave and strong, and he at last drew himself to the level. Looking eastward he saw that the elk had not perceptibly moved, and dropping on his hands and knees, he began creeping toward it.

CHAPTER XX.

LEONARD PLOTS AGAIN.

MOUNTAIN CAT was in a somewhat confused mood. He was sure the elk was Lightning Bolt's steed, and of the animal nine-tenths of the people of that part of Montana had said that it was a supernatural thing. The Pawnee had the superstition of his race to a great degree, and only for one thing he would not have ventured near it; Waldo Temple had assured him it was as much flesh and blood as any elk that roamed the foothills.

In any case there was danger for him, since Lightning Bolt must be near; that creature was a slayer of men, whether he was human himself or not.

But Mountain Cat compressed his firm mouth and crawled on. He had put aside all his weapons and drawn his lasso, and, come what might, he was resolved to capture the Giant Elk if such a thing was possible.

He was still a hundred feet away, however, when the elk suddenly erected its head and another dark form appeared beside it.

It was that of Lightning Bolt.

The Pawnee's courage "grew beautifully less," and he lay flat on the rock, content to limit his part in the scene to watching. He had no desire to meet the Elk Rider's bolts of destruction.

The latter paused for a moment beside his strange steed and, the watcher thought, seemed to caress him; then he swung into the saddle, the elk turned, and away they went at full speed. Mountain Cat had not been seen at all, and as he partially arose, he saw that as the Giant Elk sped away, Lightning Bolt did not once turn his head.

The Pawnee remained for some time silent and thoughtful. The more he saw of the mountain phenomena the less he understood them.

Both steed and rider defied all his knowledge of nature.

"Some day me find out all about dem," he muttered, in broken English. "White Arm has said we will hunt togedder, and when we do, we ketch Elk Rider—somehow, anyhow; me don't 'zactly know how."

By that time the strange twain had disappeared, and Mountain Cat went on thoughtfully toward where he made his home.

Isaac Leonard arose earlier than usual the following morning and went out to see if Missouri's boats were still plying on Brown Hand Ferry; but he had gone but a few yards when Mike Mulloy abruptly made his appearance, his face angry and chagrined.

"Dhe Ould Nick is in dhe luck!" he plaintively said. "Mr. Leonard, yez may use me head fur a football ef dhe boats ain't roight side up wid care!"

Leonard started and scowled blackly.

"Is this a fact?"

"Bedad, it's all ov dhat. Yez can see for yerself ef ye care to."

"I don't. I was just going down, but your statement is enough. Mulloy, the fiend's luck is ours, sure enough. I cannot imagine what saved those boats. We set them afloat all right, and saw them in the grasp of the current, which was sure to take them to the raceway in ten minutes. I could have sworn they were in splinters by this time."

The speaker's face was dark with anger.

"It's meself can't guess how it coome about, but dhe facts are as I tell you; dhe boats are in dhe best av condition, an' that blasted gal is rakin' in dhe spondulics. Begorra, we was fools ter leave dhe river before we saw dhe craft in dhe raceway."

"The result proves my course of reasoning true, however. I said if we hung around there we were liable to be seen by some one, and that the boats were saved proves that some one did happen along. Don't be discouraged, Mulloy; I have a new plan."

"Phat is it?"

"I am going to bridge the canyon over the river."

"Dhat is entoirely impossible."

"At least, I'll try it," added Leonard, firmly.

"I know we have never had a man sanguine enough to think it could be done; but I am going to strain every nerve, and if such a thing is possible, I'll bridge the canyon. I have sounded the people somewhat, and I find the ferry-girl has more friends than seemed possible. She has pleased her patrons, and all admire her courage. If I resort to severe measures, I verily believe I should be a dethroned king inside of three days; but by putting a bridge across I'll do away with all necessity for a ferry."

"Dhat's just what thrubbles me," said Mulloy, bitterly. "Phat good will it do me ef Missouri is bate ef I don't win dhe patronage ov dhe people?"

"I've thought of that," calmly answered Leonard, "and I will see that you have a lucrative position. Never fear for that. But the bridge is going over if we can build it; that's the only way out of our dilemma. This course will not only beat the girl, but give me fresh graft in Quartz Rock."

"I reckon ye'll find it hard worruk ter putt up dhe bridge, sor," Mulloy thoughtfully observed.

"So we shall; but I hope to construct a der-rick by which we can swing the timbers over."

After some further conversation, Mr. Leonard re-entered the house; but his troubles had only just begun. Agnes at once poured into his ears the story of her experience of the preceding night; a story to which he listened with an ominous frown.

"And now I want you to drive that girl out of town, she concluded, viciously.

"I had a good deal better put you under lock and key, and string Purcell up by the neck!" he angrily answered. "What fiend possessed you when you ventured on such a mad move? Haven't I repeatedly told you my position in this town is less stable than it was, and that we must go slow? You took a fine course to win Temple, didn't you? I don't know of a better way to make him merry Missouri, than to show him we are all against her. With his sympathies fully aroused—and they will be when he hears this story—nothing but a miracle can win our game. Confound you, girl! I am tempted to lock you in your room at once, and put you on bread and water!"

Seldom, indeed, had Agnes seen her parent in such a towering passion; but Isaac was warring against one of his own race, and her nerve was equal to the emergency.

"Try it, if you see fit!" she retorted; "but I'll burn the house down over your head if you do. Don't talk nonsense to me, my respected father. If I've been too hasty it was your fault; you are the slowest coach I ever knew!"

"You are enough to drive one mad, girl. Is Temple a grizzly bear to be driven into a trap? No; he must be coaxed, or lost. Your headstrong course is likely to ruin all."

"Give me charge of the affair, and I'll soon show you. The way to win the game is to act

boldly. Of course, while Temple can see that brazen-faced creature he will worship at the shrine. The way to prevent it is to have her disappear completely and forever."

Leonard started a little.

"How?"

"She loves the river; why not give her a passage down the canyon?"

Depraved as Leonard was, he shivered at the idea. To send a young girl, who was by far more sinned against than sinning, to such a death, was a step in crime which would surpass even his red record. He saw the necessity of showing a ruling hand.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he harshly answered. "Had you as many gray hairs in your head as are in mine, you would not counsel it. Let me manage this affair and I will win the battle yet. I have a scheme in mind which will bind Temple to us beyond escape; then, if you are wise, your arts will secure you a husband; but I warn you no man wants to marry a virago. Hear this and heed it."

The fair Agnes had studied her position in advance and seemed to accede to his demand, but she had never been more rebellious at heart. She was resolved that Missouri should be at once and permanently removed from her path.

When she went to her room she threw herself into a chair and smiled scornfully.

"We will see whether I am to be cheated out of a husband by this idiotic delay," she muttered. "Since my venerable parent will not see the difference between day and night, I must take the matter in my own hands and press on to victory. I will see Bounding Bison."

She had not arrived at this decision without a good deal of hesitation. As has been said she was very much afraid of the Blackfeet, but jealousy was spurring her on to a step which money could not have influenced her to take.

She soon arose and put on a serviceable black dress, with the rest of her outfit to match. She dared not display a jewel, and had it been possible she would have made her beautiful face less attractive. Still, she had heard it said the red-men were stoics, and this particular band was certainly under her father's orders.

When her preparations were completed she only awaited a chance to leave the house unobserved, and when it arrived she passed out at a rear door and hastened away from the village. Chance seemed to favor her, for no one was visible, and she was soon threading the mountain passes.

The majority of people would have said it was a hopeless task to look for the Blackfeet, for they came and went almost in the fashion of a will-o'-the-wisp, but there was one haunt in the hills where at least six of the band were always supposed to be. The exact locality was known to no white man except Leonard, but Agnes had taken pains to question him when he was in his more pliable moods and felt sure she could find the place.

For nearly an hour she went on and Quartz Rock was left far behind. She had literally cut loose from her friends, and amid the foothills she was liable to meet all kinds of human and brute foes.

At first she thought more about grizzlies and the Elk Rider than anything else, but as she neared the haunt of Bounding Bison her fears took a new turn; she began to realize what a mad thing it was for her to enter the quarters of the scourge of the foothills.

Realizing this she paused, wavered, and, for several moments, stood still. She was assailed by contradictory emotions and impulses. A desire for revenge urged her on; calm reason bade her retreat before it was too late.

The silence was broken by an impatient exclamation from her lips and she pushed forward again. In a few moments she stood at the cave-entrance and, with the reckless haste of one who will not give herself time for thought, she knocked for admission.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WAR-WOLF.

THE entrance to the cave was ingeniously hidden; Agnes had simply rapped upon the bleached trunk of a tree which had been deprived of its top and of life, years before, by a stroke of lightning. An uninitiated person would have said it was no more than that, but few there were knew the secret of the dead tree.

The instant after Agnes had rapped she was seized with fresh fear and, perhaps, would have turned and fled had not one side of the stump promptly swung around like a door.

Then the girl stood face to face with the grim Indian, who looked at her with undisguised amazement.

She realized the importance of proceeding boldly, now that the irrevocable step was taken, and she forced all her resolution to the front.

"I have come from Mr. Leonard. Conduct me to your chief, at once," she said, as impressively as possible.

The Indian bowed and stepped aside for her to enter the cavity of the tree, which she at once did. The novel door closed behind her

with a click and she was in total darkness. Her heart beat loudly and rapidly, but she exerted all her strength to be calm.

She still knew the way from description and followed the Blackfoot down a flight of steps without trouble. She was then in a low, wide cave. At one side it was lighted by torches; at the other by a broad blaze of daylight. Seeing the latter a stranger would have wondered of what avail was the secret entrance, with such a rent in the cave's side, but Agnes knew it was midway in the face of an unscalable cliff two hundred feet high.

Her guide led on and speedily conducted her to an inner room. It was the home of the chief and was profusely decorated with all kinds of animal's hides obtainable in Montana.

Agnes looked for Bounding Bison, whom she knew well by sight, but he was not to be seen. The sole occupant of the room was a young Indian who had certainly not seen over twenty-five years, but his decorations bespoke him already a chief.

He gazed at the girl in utter amazement for awhile, but before she had ceased looking for Bounding Bison he arose and bowed with the grace of a red Chesterfield.

"The white girl is welcome to the home of the red-men," he said, in excellent English. "The heart of War-Wolf is warm toward the gentler sex and he is honored by this visit."

His aptness with English ways and expressions might have led one to doubt his seeming nationality, but he was really of unmixed Blackfoot blood.

"I—I wish to see Bounding Bison," said Agnes, paying no attention to his gallantry.

"He is not in the cave, nor have we any means of knowing where he has gone; he may not return for a day or two. The white girl need not fear to speak freely, however; I am in charge here and I transact all business while my chief is away. Will you be seated and explain?"

Agnes hesitated a moment and then sat down. It had occurred to her that, perhaps, things were working just as she could wish. This young chief, who took such pains to be polite would be more easily deceived than the older and more sagacious Bounding Bison.

She resolved to improve the chance and try a few of her delusive smiles on the War-Wolf.

"I suppose you are surprised to see me here," she said.

"Surprised, but not sorry," said the Blackfoot, bowing.

"And you an Indian! Where did you learn the ways of white men?"

"I have been to school ten years among the white men."

"That accounts for it. But, to business. I am the daughter of Isaac Leonard, and have come as the bearer of a message. He has work for you to do."

"Describe it and the Blackfeet will go forth like bloodhounds on the trail."

"Good! This is just what my father wants. I will be brief. There is a person at the village he wants put out of the way—a woman named Missouri; the keeper of the Brown Hand Ferry. He bids you secretly kidnap this woman, and either sink her in the river or in some way put her where she will never be seen again."

This inhuman order was given without a qualm of conscience.

War-Wolf's face, however, assumed a doubtful expression.

"Why did not Leonard come himself with the message?"

"Important business kept him at the village."

"Did he send a talking-paper—a written order?"

"Certainly, not; isn't my word enough? Do you doubt me?" imperiously asked the girl.

"We have strict orders not to do harm to any of the village people without direct orders from Leonard; not a man, woman or child must be harmed without I see you and say so, was the way he spoke to Bounding Bison."

"But in this case he could not come, so he sent me instead. I am his daughter."

Even the repetition of this information did not seem to move the War-Wolf. He shook his head gravely.

"Bounding Bison might act on such authority, but I dare not," he said.

Agnes flushed with anger.

"Am I not a sufficient authority? Are you afraid to do what I wish?"

A sudden light shot into the Blackfoot's eyes. During all this conversation he had kept his gaze fixed on his visitor; he had noted her beautiful face and perfect form; and the education of the white man and the nature of the Indian combined to make him admire her.

"Do not mistake the War-Wolf," he said, softening his guttural voice. "He would rather follow the white girl than the banner of the greatest chief that ever lived!"

Agnes recoiled from his burning gaze.

"Never mind that!" she said, hurriedly.

"We are talking about my father's business. Will you obey his wishes?"

The Blackfoot did not answer at once.

"If you are afraid Bounding Bison will blame

you, I will stand between you and all harm," said Agnes, venturing another smile.

The War-Wolf moved nearer to her side.

"Let the white girl listen to me, for my words are good. I am no fool. I am a chief of my tribe and my fathers were chiefs before me. I have never met the man who could stand before me in single combat, and to the valor of an Indian I add the education of a pale-face school. I can think, act and talk like a white man, nor am I blind. Do not be angry, lady, when I say that I can read your heart. Leonard did not send you here!"

Agnes started, and again flushed.

"How dare you question my veracity?" she angrily demanded.

"I beg that you will not speak so harshly, for you have no better friend than the War-Wolf; but I can read a printed page. I suspect the ferry-girl—I have often seen her—is your enemy, and for that reason you would remove her from your path. But, in all kindness, I say Leonard did not send you. He has ordered us, under dread of the severest punishment, not to trust any one as being from him unless they gave a certain proof of sincerity, which you have not given. And only in case of a great emergency would Leonard send any one."

The schemer's castle fell to pieces. She had not thought of such a stumbling-block in her way, but had hoped to overawe the red-men, if they were obstinate, as she did the village people.

But she now felt that the battle was wholly lost.

The War-Wolf watched her keenly.

"Does the white girl hate the keeper of the ferry so much?" he slowly asked.

"I could kill her!" hissed Agnes, half-unconsciously.

The dark eyes before her, twinkled ominously.

"What if the War-Wolf should remove the ferry-girl, not as one of the band, but acting for himself?"

Fresh hope was expressed on Agnes's face.

"If you can, I will do anything—That is, you shall be well rewarded. I will give you a good deal of money."

"Wait! I have said I can see, speak, and reason like the white man. Having eyes, I see that you are more beautiful than the red rose; having a mind, I know I would like to possess you; having a tongue, I say: 'I will sweep your enemy from your path, if you will be my wife!'"

Agnes recoiled. The Blackfoot had leaned forward until his face was within three feet of her own, and his eyes sparkled like live coals. He was even a more singular compound of red man and white, than even he knew, but he was fully in earnest in his proposal; the beauty of his unexpected guest had gone straight to his head, and he was weaving day-dreams of leaving the band, and making himself a home in some remote place, with Agnes for its mistress.

But the idea chilled her blood.

"No, no!" she exclaimed; "I couldn't think of it. You are mad to speak of such a thing."

Mad or not, the War-Wolf had spoken of it, and he was not ready to abandon the idea so easily.

Proud of his ancestry and his own deeds of valor, he considered himself the equal of the girl, and, still looking at her with devouring eyes, he made a plea which was not without a certain kind of eloquence.

Agnes heard, and though the mere thought of a union with an Indian made her shudder, she formed a sudden and rash resolution. The object of her visit was to have her rival removed, and she resolved to do it at any cost. She believed she saw her way clear. This Indian suitor could be easily deceived; she would pretend to agree to his suit until Missouri was out of the way—then it would be a very simple matter to turn her own back forever on the War-Wolf.

Had she known the man better, or even had a fair knowledge of his race, she would never have considered so desperate a plan. If he, with his education, could tell his love like a white man, it did not follow he had lost the power of avenging like an Indian.

But, heedless of the pit she was digging for her feet, she went on in the course decided upon.

It was no easy matter to arrange it satisfactorily to both parties. She must seem to yield to gain him for an ally, but at the same time he must be made content to be no more than a distant friend until the work was done. She could not have tolerated the touch of his lips.

The work of managing him was one fit only for a woman or a diplomatist—we place woman first because we believe her shrewder than a diplomatist—but Agnes was equal to it.

The War-Wolf was made to believe the death of Missouri would be the signal for his triumph; really, it would be the harbinger of his total defeat.

CHAPTER XXII.

LIGHTNING BOLT AT WORK.

MATTERS requiring great diplomatic tact are not settled in the twinkling of an eye; and when

Agnes had at last arranged matters to suit her, she began to realize that a good deal of time had passed since her entrance to the cave.

Clearly, she must be getting out of it unless she wished to be caught by darkness on the mountain.

She said as much to the young chief, and though he at first urged her to stay, offering his own escort to the village after nightfall, he gave way gracefully, after the fashion of an engaged white man.

She arose, and he started toward the place of exit with her.

All his force—five men—were outside the cave except himself and the guard, who stood in the hollow tree, and they were passing along quietly, when a dull and sickening thud was borne to their ears from a point Agnes could not locate.

But the War-Wolf laid his hand on his revolver, and directed his gaze toward the broad belt of light before mentioned.

He had stopped, and was looking with an uneasy expression on his face.

"Remain here a moment, white girl," he said. "I will return almost immediately."

He strode away, and as the shadows of the cave were far from being pleasant, she followed. Before she had overtaken him, an exclamation announced that he had made some important discovery, but she did not pause. Pressing on, she stood beside him.

As has been said this orifice in the cave opened out on the face of a cliff. The opening itself was forty feet long and ten high. Beyond it projected a ledge which, however, dwindled away at both ends until it became indistinguishable.

Standing on the ledge one could look up a hundred feet and scan the face of the cliff. For one-half of the way it was almost as smooth as glass. Looking down, the bed of the canyon was to be seen thirty-five yards away.

The canyon was wide; so wide, in fact, that only a good shot could have hit a man standing on the ledge, but they took care not to expose themselves needlessly.

When Agnes moved to the Blackfoot's side, however, she saw a sight which drove the blood from her cheeks. On the ledge lay a shapeless heap. Had it not been for the garments it wore one could not at first have distinguished it as all that was left of a man, but as it was she had no difficulty in perceiving that it was one of the Blackfoot band.

The War-Wolf bent over him and then, turning, saw Agnes. He started, and then took her by the arm and led her back out of sight of the ledge.

"This is no sight for you," he said. "Flying Hawk has lost his footing and fallen to his death. He was a valiant warrior and the Blackfeet will mourn—"

He paused as there was an unusual sound from near the entrance, and then three of his men came hurrying down without any pretense to dignity.

"Lightning Bolt is here!" they cried.

Dismay is contagious, and the War-Wolf, who had boasted—and not without reason—that he feared no man, looked positively startled as he flashed a quick glance up the steps which led to the hollow tree.

The Elk Rider, however, was not visible, as the announcement would seem to indicate.

"Where is he?" asked the chief, rallying.

"Outside the cave. He suddenly appeared, caught Flying Hawk in his arms and dashed him over the cliff. We fled for our lives, and, as we were near the entrance, managed to save ourselves."

A pause followed, during which all looked anxiously about, as though Lightning Bolt might come through the solid rock.

"Why do you not go forth and meet him?" Agnes demanded. "Now is your time; you know he is near; you can rid your band of the terrible scourge."

The War-Wolf shook his head gloomily.

"What can man do against a demon? The Evil Spirit slays at sight, and laughs at our weapons of war."

"Nonsense!" said she contemptuously. "He is as much human as you or I. Shoot at him with steady nerves, and I promise you the Elk Rider will drop like common game."

She might as well have spared her breath. If she spoke truth, the Blackfoot at least knew the strange being better than she; they had seen their warriors fall all the way from the Yellowstone to the Bitter Root, on plain and in mountain pass, under the broad glare of the noonday sun and in the still hours of the night.

Knowing his work as they did, they had no desire to seek him.

Agnes could not sympathize with them. Each minute's delay made her position in the cave more unpleasant. Time was passing; if she left at once she could no more than reach Quartz Rock by nightfall. But when would she be able to leave?

Anxious as she was to have the Indians seek the Elk Rider, she had no desire to meet him herself.

She laid the case before the War-Wolf, and

urged him to help her. He hesitated, wavered, declined, consented. Despite his red skin, he had a sort of chivalrous regard for a woman who had consented to become his wife.

"But, pay attention to me," he added. "If I risk the lives of my warriors I do it for you, and such devotion must have its reward. If the rain nourishes the flower, it is that Nature may be more beautiful and tender."

"You have my promise," answered Agnes; "and a Leonard never breaks a promise!"

It was an empty, groundless boast, but War-Wolf hesitated no longer. He would endeavor to start her safely on her way.

When he spoke to his warriors their looks became rebellious, but his authority was supreme in the absence of Bounding Bison, and they dared not refuse. He mapped out his plan and explained it, and measures were taken to carry it into execution.

An effigy was soon formed from old clothes and made to look as much like a man as possible, and the work was so well done that if supernatural beings are not very sharp-sighted, and the Elk Rider was one of the class, there was a hope of deceiving him.

War-Wolf generously took the greatest danger upon himself. It was he who shoved the door in the dead tree aside and put out the dummy.

It did not meet with a bolt from the destroyer. All remained quiet, nor could the Rider be seen.

When this decoy had been satisfactorily used, the real Indians glided out, taking to the cover of the rocks as soon as was possible. The silence remained unbroken; the impression became general that Lightning Bolt had gone from the vicinity.

Then Agnes ventured out, with War-Wolf by her side. The Blackfoot had become the alert and sagacious warrior. He moved with a panther-like step, and his gaze wandered over all the vicinity with the keenness of an eagle's. The girl moved shiveringly at his side. Man or demon, Lightning Bolt was greatly to be feared and the color of her cheeks was less roseate than usual.

But the Elk Rider did not appear to molest them and they soon reached a point a hundred yards away. There Agnes paused.

"Here we part," she said.

"Better let the Blackfoot go to the village with you. The way is long, and night will overtake you before you see the dwellings of your people. No one will dare molest you when War-Wolf is your protector."

Agnes could not entertain the idea.

"I have no fear now," she answered, "and you are needed with your men; Lightning Bolt is abroad and the War-Wolf's voice is needed to cheer his braves. Go, now, but do not forget your promise."

"A Blackfoot never forgets; the pale girl who keeps the ferry shall die. Let Rosebud have no fear. The War-Wolf will go to his warriors, but his heart will be with Rosebud, and he will dream of the day when she shall be all his own. In the hour of our betrothal death was abroad near the cave, and our vows are baptized in blood. We will never forget. Farewell, fairest of the maids of your tribe—farewell!"

The young chief made a lofty gesture, turned and glided back toward his men.

Agnes was alone, but she did not remain inactive. Facing toward Quartz Rock, she hurried away at a light run. She longed for the privacy of her apartment, where she could reflect on the events of the day—on her rash pledge to the Blackfoot. She thought of him with a shiver. Absurd as had been his remarks about a "baptism of blood," it had gone straight to her heart; the words ever rung in her ears, and, now and then, she glanced behind her as though expecting to see him following to assert his claim.

And that night, when safe in her own room, she retired to dream of him, always in some strange and alarming way.

In the mean while, War-Wolf had made his way back to the vicinity of the cave.

The moment he was away from Agnes he became wholly the astute warrior, and he scanned the elevated rocks with hawk-like keenness. But there was no sign of the Elk Rider.

None of the Indians cared to search for him. If he was gone, it would be useless; if he was still near, it would be to meet his bolts of destruction. So they unanimously decided to retreat to the cover of the cave.

One by one they went, War-Wolf remaining to go last and still watching for their dread foe. Nor was his watch in vain.

As he looked upward two forms suddenly appeared on a flat rock and he saw Lightning Bolt and the Giant Elk. The position of the latter was as statuesque as ever; from the moment he appeared he seemed like a graven image; but the dread Rider's gaze was directed toward the dead tree. Then his hand arose above his head and a round, blazing ball shot down with mathematical precision.

War-Wolf uttered a cry and flung himself prone on the ground. Then followed an explosion and the dust drifted over him. He looked up in alarm. Lightning Bolt and his elk stood

had disappeared, but on the ground lay one of the Blackfeet, torn and lifeless.

Hurriedly, his surviving companions bore him into the cave and secured the entrance so that no human being could enter. Then, in a group, they crouched in the darkest part of the subterranean abode and watched and listened, shivering when any sound was borne to their ears.

But the Elk Rider did not again appear. He had done his work and gone; his hand had taken the lives of two brawny warriors and left only a chilling dread in their place.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TEMPLE RECEIVES AN OFFER.

ISAAC LEONARD did not let any time go to waste. Having once decided to build a bridge over the canyon, he pushed ahead with the first steps toward accomplishing his purpose. In the village was a man named Engley, whom he knew to be very ingenious, and he invited him to walk to the river, the scheme being explained as they went.

Of course the sole question was whether the "stringers," or supporting timbers, of the bridge could be thrown across the raceway. With this once done the remainder of the work would be easy.

Standing on one side of the stream, they closely surveyed it and calculated on the result. As has before been explained, the river, after leaving Brown Hand Ferry, flowed through a comparatively narrow passage with a wall of rock for either bank, and as the descent was rapid the water shot down at a speed which left the surface a white mass of foam.

No man nor no boat could live there; the bridge must be built without touching the water.

But could the timbers be placed to span the raceway without touching the water? That was the question. They lacked the means which would have been open to them in a more civilized part of the country, and must rely on their own ingenuity, while none of them had ever seen such a work done even with elaborate appliances.

Engley believed the thing possible, and he told his master that if he would see the stringers made—no easy work, since very tall trees must be found to get suitable ones—he would undertake to construct a derrick by which they could be thrown across.

This decision arrived at, Leonard lost no time in setting his men to work. Some were sent for the stringers, while others were put under Engley's orders.

Leonard was busy about this work when he was interrupted by the approach of a man—a half-breed—who placed in his hand a singular ornament of bone. The man was one always sent by Bounding Bison when he had need of a messenger; the bone signified that he wished to see the white chief of Quartz Rock.

So the latter followed the half-breed, and was soon in the presence of the Blackfoot chief. The latter had come with five of his men to a canyon half a mile from the village.

He nodded stoically at sight of his ally.

"Is anything wrong?" Leonard quickly asked.

"No, but the Blackfoot has something of importance to say. Does Leonard know a young man named Waldo Temple?"

"Yes. What of him?"

"The other day he was my prisoner—"

"What! have you dared molest him?"

"Wait!" said Bounding Bison, coldly. "Hear me through. He came spying on the camp of the Blackfeet and was captured. I knew he was not one of the village people, and when we questioned him he answered with a forked tongue—"

"Cease your Indian lingo. Talk English!" Leonard impatiently interrupted.

"Just as you say, pard. Well, I had serious thoughts of giving my red devils a jamboree at his expense, and stripped him to the waist, when, lo! upon his arm I saw a peculiar device worked in India-ink. Ike, you may scarcely believe me, but it was that of a *chained eagle*!"

"What of it?"

"A good deal of it. I see you are not surprised, so, of course, you know who he is, but I swear I did not expect to see Waldron Temple's son in this section."

"How do you know the young man is his son?"

"The name is evidence enough, but the chained eagle settles the last doubt. It is the boy we once knew, now grown to a man. All well and good; I don't aspire to interfere with your plans; but what I want is to have light thrown on them. What sort of a game are you playing?"

Leonard hesitated for a moment, and then abruptly replied:

"I propose to marry Agnes to him."

"Aha! and for what reason?"

"Safety."

"I think I catch on; yes, I am sure I do; and I commend your plan. He seems a good match, and, as a son-in-law, would be more desirable than as an avenger. Your scheme is a good one; rope him in. But where did you find him?"

"He strayed here, himself. I have not seen the chained eagle on his arm, but I knew him

the moment I saw his face, and his name settled the rest. Yes, I am going to marry him to Agnes. She's dead in love with him, and as he is a man of nerve he will be a useful lieutenant for me at Quartz Rock."

"Has he proposed yet?"

"No; and that isn't the worst of it. He does not fancy Agnes so much as he does another girl, but I will break off the latter match or put both of them in their graves. I have a plan for coaxing him into marriage with Agnes."

Half an hour longer the men lingered in conversation; then Leonard turned his face toward the village and Bounding Bison went to rejoin the main body of his men.

Waldo Temple did not neglect to tell Missouri of the fresh attempt made to defeat her at the Brown Hand, by setting the boats adrift. Without dwelling on his own narrow escape from death, while saving her property, he gave her to clearly understand that but for Mountain Cat and himself they would then have been in splinters instead of running on the ferry.

It did not surprise her, for she had known before that Isaac Leonard was in dead earnest, but it showed that there was to be no peace for her. For a while she was tempted to abandon both the Brown Hand and the village, but her usual courage soon returned and she resolved to fight to the end.

She was, however, put under fresh obligations to Temple, and she felt her resolution to keep him at a distance wavering perceptibly. All of us, when in trouble, are willing to have a strong arm upon which to lean.

She did not betray her thoughts in this respect, however, and Temple went away very well satisfied with her earnest thanks, and resolved to still watch over and help her.

Had it not been for her he would have left Quartz Rock at once. Gaffer Golightly was urging a departure, and Temple, himself, had grown to hate the town. Only Missouri was endurable, but she was so much more than that he could not leave. He had at last reached the point where he knew he loved her, and he was not inclined to desert the field.

That evening Isaac Leonard called on him at the hotel.

"I've come on a somewhat peculiar errand," said the rich man "but as I am very plain-dealing I will not beat about the bush. You know Quartz Rock is a somewhat exclusive place—that, as we are a sort of settlement of hermits, we rarely take in outsiders?"

"Yes," quietly answered Temple.

"Well, I am sorry to say I have been reminded of the fact. In plain words, I have received two or three letters, the writers of which say to me that you are a supernumerary in town, and that I ought to ask you to leave."

"And you have come on this errand?"

Temple still remained calm and collected.

"By no means," said Isaac, hastily. "On the contrary, I have a plan in view which will thwart them all. I hereby offer you a partnership in my mine, with full privileges of citizenship. Wait! Do not answer hastily. I am aware we are far from the so-called civilized world, but I venture to prophesy it will not be many years before Montana will have an enviable name. Her grazing resources in the east, and those of mining here in the mountains, will soon attract both cattle-raisers and gold-diggers, and those who are here first will have a great advantage and become rich men. It is such a prospect which will open to you if you accept my offer."

This speech was made with all the eloquence and persuasion Leonard could muster. Temple was glad he spoke at such length; it gave him a chance to meditate.

He understood his visitor better than the latter expected, and he was ready with his answer when the time came.

"This is an unexpected proposal," he said, with a thoughtful air. "I am in the West only for pleasure and have not thought of settling."

"Yet, a chance to become a millionaire is not to be despised, is it?" laughingly asked Leonard.

"Surely not."

"I do not hold out any delusive hopes to you; the mine will speak for itself. You shall examine it, and if you are in any degree a practical miner you will soon be convinced. Perhaps you wonder that I extend the invitation to a stranger. Well, I am not so young as I was once, and I see the need of a young head and youthful activity in my business, and men are never so much in earnest as when working for themselves. I say, most frankly, that I am pleased with you. That is why I am more than willing to take you as a partner."

Temple saw the need of strategy and played his part well. He asked various questions concerning the matter, such as would naturally occur to one contemplating the step, and Leonard believed he was in the net.

And when the young man asked for a little time in which to consider the matter, a cheerful consent was given.

Neither mentioned the name of Missouri, and Leonard began to hope that his companion's fancy for her was not so strong as he had feared. There was no evidence that he had

heard of Agnes's indiscreet and hostile visit to the ferry-girl.

Temple finally bowed his visitor out and then returned to his chair. Sitting down, he lit his pipe and endeavored to clearly understand the situation.

Leonard and Agnes both wished him to marry the latter. That much was certain. Next, Leonard's latest offer was intended as a bait for him to enter the matrimonial trap; at least, the young man was almost positive such was the fact; but it gave rise to a question not so easily solved.

What was their object?

Temple was not a vain man, but as he knew "love" to be only another name for eccentric fancy, he acknowledged, with becoming humility, that the beautiful Agnes might be in love with him. But not so Isaac. What, then, was the latter's motive?

He was not of the timber of which indulgent fathers are made. He was both stern and selfish; he would consider himself rather than his daughter's heart, in seeking a husband for her.

Again the question arose—*what was his object?*

Temple could not tell, but as he went over the whole ground he was convinced there was a mystery in the case which he had yet to solve.

To learn it now became his ruling passion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THREE NOBLE RED-MEN.

JACK PURCELL did not forget or forgive. He had been terrible humiliated at Pumphrey's cabin, first by Temple and then by Mountain Cat, and nothing cuts more deeply to the feelings than humiliation in the presence of the woman one loves.

So, Purcell swore revenge and look about for means to satisfy the passion. Like Agnes, he rebelled against Isaac Leonard's mode of procedure; his hot, impatient blood could ill brook the delay the elder, but more wily, man counseled.

Consequently, he looked for means of satisfying his hatred at once. Waldo Temple must be removed from his path and pret y Missouri made his wife. These two ideas became as much a part of his life as the air he breathed.

He formed his plans accordingly, and on this eventful evening—when Agnes was returning from her visit to War-Wolf, and Leonard was making known his new scheme—Jack was only waiting for the magnate to get out of the way to put a scheme of his own into effect.

Thus it was that, as Temple still sat as recorded in the last chapter, a boy approached and informed him that Gaffer Golightly wished to see him at Shoestring Gulch, a place a little outside of the village.

Temple could not imagine what could be the reason for a meeting at that place; but as Gaffer had been out on a hunt since noon he might have discovered something of importance. That the message would lead to a trap he did not once suspect, and he promptly announced that he would follow the boy.

Leaving the hotel they passed through the village and toward Shoestring Gulch, Temple carrying his rifle carelessly thrown across his shoulder. He had taken it from force of habit, more than with an idea that he should have use for it.

Shoestring Gulch was not a very inviting looking place in a dark evening, and as the boy led the way into its dark mouth, Temple aroused from thought and looked keenly about him.

"See here!" he exclaimed, "how far are we going into this hole? It is as gloomy as a tomb."

"Tombs never hurt nobody, an' I reckon this place won't," the boy carelessly replied. "Gaff is a leetle funder on."

"Your name is Jim Todd, is it?"

"Yes."

"All right; I want to know who to 'thrash' if you lead me into any trap."

"Trap? Thunderation! you needn't be skeered—not so fur ez I know. I reckon Gaff ain't ther man ter play any pranks, an' ef he is, I ain't ther chap ter help him. You see— Did anything fall?"

Something did fall. While the boy talked so glibly, engaging Temple's attention, a dark form had glided out from behind a bowlder, and with one blow of a club struck the young man to the ground. He lay quite still; but Jim Todd followed up his question by the remark:

"That was a daisy, old man!"

Two other dark forms had appeared beside the first.

"Is he dead?" asked one.

"Tain't likely he is; but I've knocked him sensible," said the man with the club.

"Begorra, it's meself couldn't have done better," said the third of the trio.

All these men were dressed as Indians, and their faces and hands were browned with the juice of some berry; but though they would have passed for Blackfeet at first sight, they were no more of that nationality than the man they had trapped. In brief, they were Jack Purcell, Mike Mulloy and Tom Todd, the father of Jim.

"What now?" asked Tom. "Shall I use my knife?"

"No," said Purcell, quickly. "Blood is always sure to turn State's evidence against a man. We are only a short distance from the river; let's carry him there and give him to the fishes. If he falls leave enough of him to be recognized, it will be thought he fell in by accident."

"Wal, you're boss hyar, an' it goes ez you sez. Jim, git home ez quick ez your legs kin carry ye."

The boy, who was a vicious young scamp, lingered, anxious to see the work through, but he dared not oppose his father, and slunk away like a wolf abandoning a feast.

"Catch hold of the body, boys, and let us get the work done," resumed Purcell. "We don't want to be seen, though our disguises are perfect, and the Blackfeet are pretty certain to get credit for the job if any one does chance to drop on us."

Temple was lifted and they hurried toward the river. The journey was not a long one and they soon stood at the top of the race-way, with the noise of the rushing water sounding in their ears.

"Wait a leetle," said Todd. "It seems ter be rank waste ter let all these fine clothes be throwed away. Jest let me hev his shirt, will ye? It's flannel, thick an' soft, an' jest what I want."

"Nonsense! I have promised to pay you for your work; that's enough," said Purcell, impatiently. "And if the shirt is missing when the body is found it will be a dead give-away."

"But I'll put mine on in its place, Cap."

Purcell did not in the least approve of the idea, but he knew Todd to be singularly obstinate, and feared, since he was one of Leonard's followers, that he might tell tales if thwarted; so he reluctantly agreed to the plan.

Mulloy turned on the blaze of a dark lantern and Todd deftly removed the coveted garment, but it suddenly dropped from his hands, he caught the lantern and, directing the light on their victim stared in stupid surprise.

"What is the matter?" Purcell impatiently asked. "Do you see a ghost?"

"By thunder! I believe I do!" Todd exclaimed. "Do ye see that India-ink work on his arm? What do ye call it?"

"Looks loike an 'agle wid a chain around his leg," said Mike.

"The chained eagle!" muttered Todd.

"What of it?"

"Nothin', nothin'," said the man, hastily; "only it's a quar' sort o' a figger. Never mind; chuck him in!"

The trio once more bent over their prisoner, but as they did so something unexpected happened. His limbs were contracted as though by a spasm, and then both feet shot forward and, catching Tom Todd in the stomach, knocked him three yards away.

Another moment and Temple was on his feet.

Purcell and Mulloy were for a moment held motionless by surprise, and before they could recover from their surprise the young man was upon them like a thunderbolt. His fist shot out and, catching Mulloy between the eyes, knocked him over in a heap, and then he turned upon his remaining enemy.

The gambler put up his hands for a guard, but it availed him little. A shower of blows was rained upon his face, and though he regained his courage and tried to make a suitable return, he found that he was but a child in the hands of his rival. Temple fought scientifically, and parried every stroke made toward him, while his own blows came in thick and heavy.

Mulloy gained his feet, but the first blow had filled his eyes with tears, having been upon his nose, and as Temple was watching for him he paused long enough to give him one more and followed Purcell up hotly.

It was too much for the gambler to stand, and he wheeled and ran at full speed, closely followed by Mulloy.

Temple was master of the field.

"I don't believe those fellows will aspire to figure as noble red-men again," he muttered, grimly, as he turned to see if any weapons were scattered about. "But where is number three?—the man who seemed to know something about the chained eagle. Ah! here he is, flat on his back and insensible. My heels didn't agree with his wind. I'll wait for you to recover, Mr. Tom Todd, for I have a word to say to you."

He put his garments back where they belonged and, finding his rifle where they had laid it down, seated himself beside Todd and, sharply watching for his other enemies, patiently waited the return of the fellow's senses.

He came around in due time, with a preliminary groan, for his stomach felt as though an elephant had stepped on it, but when he sat erect he forgot physical pain as he saw Temple and his rifle before him.

"Don't trouble yourself to rise," said the victor, coolly. "I have a word to say to you, Mr. Todd."

"Blow yer horn," said the fellow, sullenly.

"If I was a vindictive man I should give you the fate you vainly tried to make mine, and throw you into the canyon, but I am willing to

forego vengeance on one condition. Obey me in that particular and you shall go free."

"What is it?"

"What do you know of the figure on my arm—the chained eagle?"

"Didn't know ye had one thar," said Todd, but he had not been able to hide a start.

"Don't lie to me. I became conscious sooner than you thought—ay, before you laid me down—and I saw and heard your surprise when you discovered the figure. You uttered an exclamation which was not to be mistaken, and I know you are lying when you deny knowledge of it. Tell me all, or over you go into the canyon!"

"I only said 'twas a qu'ar one," muttered Tom.

"You did say that, but it was to cover up your show of emotion. Sometime in the past you had seen the chained eagle before. When and where?"

"Nowhar?"

"Beware!"

"I can't tell what I don't know."

"No, but you can tell what you do know, and you are going to do it. Speak out!"

"I'll be durned ef I do!"

"Very well; over you go into the canyon."

He moved toward the fellow, but a subdued roar followed his advance.

"Hol' on! hol' on!" said Tom, excitedly.

"You wouldn't murder a feller, would ye?"

"You brought me fifty yards to throw me in, and I reckon the sword will cut both ways."

"But it warn't me; Purcell made me do it."

"Tom Todd, this childish whining will not save you. I have made my decision, and I will stick to it. Will you go into the canyon or talk?"

"I'll talk," sullenly answered Tom.

"Very well. Then tell me where you have seen the chained eagle before."

"Ike Leonard has one on his arm jest like it."

"Leonard?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I kin sw'ar to it; but ef ye want ter live out ther hest o' yer days, ye better not ax him ter see it. I ketch'd on by accident, an' when I mentioned it, he looked at me ez though he would chaw my ear off. I never hev spoke about it sence."

"Do you swear to this?"

"Yas."

"And it is all you know?"

"Everything, ez true ez I'm a livin' sinner. It ain't much in you're sight, mebbe, but ef ye knowed Ike ez I do, you wouldn't car' ter give away his secrets. He's a slasher from Cut-throat City, when he gets his mad up, an' ef he ever knows I've gi'n him away, he'll scatter me all around in pieces."

The man seemed to be speaking the truth, and Temple told him he could go, a permission of which he availed himself without any delay whatever.

Neither did Temple hover around the place. His enemies might reappear in a body; he at once started for the hotel.

The mystery was growing more obscure. Until he came to Quartz Rock he had never supposed the figure on his arm had any particular significance; but since his coming, Bounding Bison, Mountain Cat and Tom Todd, had successively seen it, and shown great surprise. What did it mean?

Now he was told that Leonard had the same strange figure on his arm, and the question naturally arose: In what way was the chained eagle connected with that man's desire to have him for a son-in-law? And what drama of the past did it represent?

"Mountain Cat must explain this mystery!" Temple declared.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIRST MAN ACROSS THE BRIDGE.

HE saw no more of his enemies on his way to the village, and, on the whole, returned in better spirits than he had left it. His adventure had done him no harm, and the fact was clearly established that Jack Purcell would not hesitate to use any means to get rid of him—a very important matter to be considered when one has a rival.

It also became evident that Isaac Leonard's fancy for him arose from some reason shrouded in the vista of bygone years; undoubtedly a period beyond his recollection.

Why did both of them have the strange device on their arms? What did Bounding Bison and Mountain Cat know about it?

These and other questions Temple asked himself without being able to find any answer, but he became more fixed in his resolution to get to the bottom of the mystery. That Leonard had known him when he was a mere child looked probable, and he began to suspect there had been a drama in those long-passed years of which he had never known.

Mountain Cat must be made to talk.

Temple found Gaffer at their quarters, and wholly unsuspecting that anything had been wrong. He was not undecieved, but as the young man was tired and sleepy, he went at once to bed.

The following day was one of the most prominent in the history of Quartz Rock. News had gone abroad that Leonard was going to attempt to bridge the canyon, and as a result not one-fourth of the men went to their work as usual. In their opinion, they could see a sight by remaining which money could not secure for them any other day.

The sequel proved they were right.

When Temple had been down to the canyon and inspected the derrick-crane, which was fast nearing completion, and had taken a look at the stringers which were on their way, being rolled on skids, he walked down to Brown Hand Ferry.

He found the boats idly rocking at the pier, and in the larger one the Adams brothers were fast asleep.

Missouri greeted him with a calm, friendly smile.

"Do you want to cross, sir?"

"Well, no," he replied; "and it looks as though the balance of your patrons were of the same mind."

"Yes; they want to stay and see the bridge built," she carelessly answered.

"You take it coolly."

"Why not? I cannot prevent it; and as it would be folly to ask Mr. Leonard to give up his idea, I may as well be cool. Besides, the bridge will be an excellent thing—if built!"

"But it will utterly kill your trade. People will not pay to cross in your boats when they can walk over the bridge for nothing."

"They would be foolish if they did. Of course, the Brown Hand Ferry is a thing of the past the moment the canyon is bridged. Still, I have done a very fair business here and ought not to complain. Nature certainly did me a favor when the river was so peculiarly made, and when my day is past I will sell my boats for kindling-wood and leave Quartz Rock."

"Where shall you go?"

"I really don't know."

"You will not go without telling me?"

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, saying nothing, but when she answered it was as he could wish.

"After all I owe you, I would not creep away like a thief in the dark," she added, with some emotion.

"Promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"When you go, let me be your guard. The way will be full of danger, both from man and beast; let Gaffer and me go to protect you."

"What would Agnes Leonard do without you?" she asked mischievously.

"I neither know nor care," he answered, frowning.

"Well, I will, at least, give you due notice before leaving, but I warn you the bridge is not yet built. There's many a slip, and so forth, you know."

When Temple returned to the lower part of the village he found nearly all the inhabitants gathered there, and in the excitement of the occasion they had entirely forgotten Missouri. The stringers were on the ground and the derrick put together, and Engley was working it to see that it was without a flaw.

The miners were very much interested. They argued that a bridge would not only save them a few cents every day—and thereby enable them to drink more whisky—but would be a great addition to the town's prosperity and commercial standing. Of course, as regarded the probability of the bridge being built, some were sanguine and others the reverse, and as a result numerous wagers were made and the excitement ran high.

At noon there was an adjournment for dinner, but the men had never been known to eat so quick; all soon came pouring back.

"Now, then," said Leonard, briskly, "let's get right down to work and see if we can lay the stringers."

"Cap," shouted a voice from the crowd, "I'll give ye fifty cents ter be ther fust man ter cross ther bridge!"

"I bid one dollar!" shouted another voice.

"I make it two."

"Two dollars I'm bid; who'll give me three?" demanded a facetious man. "Going at two dollars—going—go over the bridge, you galoot that bid two!"

Leonard liked this mood of the crowd, and did all he could to encourage it, and it was decided that, when the bridge was formally opened, there should be a drawing of lots to see who should have the honor of crossing first.

But it was necessary to hatch the chickens before counting them.

Engley and his assistants settled down to work, and the derrick grappled with the first stringer not far from its center. Then it was raised and swung around until it dangled over the canyon.

The crowd watched breathlessly. Would it be laid across, as was desired?

The derrick was a huge, towering affair, but it creaked dismally under the strain brought to bear upon it, and, at one time, seemed likely to fall to pieces.

But it did not. Slowly Engley swung the long timber around, and calculating finely, laid

it in the due course. Then it was dropped, and the first step in bridging the canyon was taken; and the tremendous cheer which floated over toward the Brown Hand Ferry awoke the Adams brothers and made them instinctively grasp their weapons.

There was no one to cross, however, and it looked as though the ferry would be dead property from that day.

The second stringer was laid in the same way as the first, and the work was practically done. To lay smaller timbers to connect the two, and to put on the split slabs designed for planking, would be but child's play compared to the rest of it.

And the miners nearly went wild with enthusiasm, and so many of them volunteered to help, the work went forward with a rush; and at four o'clock Isaac Leonard stood on the bank and saw a completed bridge before him. All was done, and a child might have crossed the canyon over which no man had ever been known to go before that day.

It was a great triumph for him, for, not only had he won the battle against the ferry-girl, but its success had given him back his old-time prestige as ruler of the town. The miners were once more his slaves, and he could hardly resist the temptation to go over to the Brown Hand and taunt his defeated rival for river patronage.

"Now, boys," he said, cheerily, "just step over to The Hearstone, and each and every one of you shall drink at my expense. Having done this, we will draw lots to see who shall cross the bridge first in our formal opening."

A fresh cheer greeted his remark, and the crowd surged over to the hotel and drank freely.

"Now for the lottery," he added. "You see yonder noble structure, raised with our own hands. It is a triumph of genius; an honor to the nineteenth century. It may not compete with the steam-engine and the telegraph, but it is all ours. Now, gentlemen, who shall be the first to cross it? A lottery shall decide the question, and—"

Mr. Leonard was going like a Fourth-of-July orator, when a sudden murmur ran through the crowd; a murmur so different from the tone of applause, that he ceased speaking and, seeing that all were looking westward, directed his own gaze in the same direction.

No wonder the men had muttered.

There, sweeping past the village at full speed, he saw Lightning Bolt and his Giant Elk.

The animal was moving with great speed, his course toward the south, and Lightning Bolt sat erect, and never once looked around. The observers seemed to hold their breath; the strange twain had never before been seen so near the village. Children cried aloud with fear, women grew pale, and more than one sturdy miner looked about as though anxious to find a path of retreat.

Suddenly a murmur arose from the crowd. The Giant Elk was rapidly approaching the canyon and one thought was in every mind. Nearer he swept, and then, with a rattling of hoofs, he struck the planking of the new river-span, and dashed across as coolly as though solid earth was beneath his feet.

The formal opening had been forestalled.

Lightning Bolt was the first man to cross the bridge!

It was not until the Giant Elk struck the ground on the southern side of the river that the spectators aroused from the spell his appearance had cast over them. Then no one thought of pursuing. Considering how far he had gone, it would be useless, anyway, and those who believed the twain to be superhuman creatures certainly would not think of chasing them.

So he came and went like a dark cloud across the heavens.

Leonard saw the mood of his audience and tried to laugh it off, but when he was about to proceed with the drawing of lots no one stepped forward.

"No, sir," said a grizzled old fellow, in the front ranks, "I don't take no part in it. It's a bad sign when Lightning Bolt appears on such an occasion, and I tell ye ther bridge is bound ter be an unlucky one. I shall only cross it when obleeged to."

Once more Leonard attempted to dispel the gloom by a series of jests, but the audience was not of that kind. The ideas of their spokesman had been adopted as an authority, and though no one said he would not use the bridge when he had business across the river, it was generally agreed that the appearance of the Elk Rider at that moment was a very bad omen.

Consequently, there was no formal opening of the bridge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SEARCH FOR THE ELK RIDER.

WALDO TEMPLE was not one of those who gathered at the hotel to drink at Leonard's expense. On the contrary, he had remained on the south side of the river, after first crossing, and intended to return by way of the ferry after seeing the procession cross.

He had taken a seat, and was awaiting their movement, when a sound near his side caused

him to look around quickly. A look of pleasure crossed his face as he saw Mountain Cat, and the Pawnee almost smiled as he nodded and advanced.

"How do, White Arm? Why you not ober dere wid rest?"

"I'd rather be here with you, Mountain Cat. You are just the man I wanted to see."

"What wrong? Bad pale-faces trouble ferry-gal more? Let dem look out; mestep on dem as on snake."

"Missouri is all right, I believe; but I had an adventure last night. Purcell tried to kill me."

The Pawnee frowned.

"Him rattlesnake; me warn you bes' look out. How it happen, hay?"

Waldo described his adventure with the three men, dwelling strongly on the episode of the chained eagle. The Indian heard, but, except for a slight frown, his face told no tales; his nature was the stoical one of his race.

"Now, Mountain Cat," added Temple, "I ask you as a friend to tell me what you know of this mystic emblem, or whatever it is. To me, it never had any distinct meaning until I came to Quartz Rock. Then I fell into the hands of Bounding Bison, and he was about to kill me when he saw the chained eagle on my arm. Seeing, he abruptly changed his mind and said I would be spared for a time. Next, you came; and you too, knew something about the figure. Tom Todd was the third one to see and express wonder; but when I forced his secret from him he only knew the same device was on the arm of Isaac Leonard—the representation of the chained eagle."

He paused and waited for an answer, but none came.

"What do you think of this, Mountain Cat?"

The Pawnee shook his head.

"I think I am surrounded by mystery," continued Temple, "and that it is in your power to dissipate the uncertainty under which I labor. I believe if I knew the meaning of this device, I should also know why Leonard is so friendly to me. Knowing this, I might be able to foil his schemes, when otherwise, I shall be ruined by them. You have called yourself my brother; now prove it by telling what you know of the matter."

The Pawnee's face was very grave.

"White Arm has requested what I would not have asked of him. Some suns ago, when on the mountain, I told him I could not explain just yet. Now he asks me in the name of our brotherhood."

"Forgive me, Mountain Cat; your reproof is just. I will amend my question; I will not ask as a brother, but, rather, as a mere acquaintance. If you will tell me what you know I will be sincerely grateful."

"Not all, but what I can tell, I will. Some moons ago, when in my native country, where the broad Platte washes the plain, I was told that two persons bore the figure of the chained eagle. One of these was Isaac Leonard; the other was a young white man who, if living, would be a few years older than myself. If living, I said, brother, for my informant did not know whether such was the case or not. But your name was given me, and I always remembered it until I met you on the mountain."

"Who told you all this?"

"I have explained all I can, White Arm, and I trust you will be content to wait until I can unloose my tongue and explain all you would know; you need not wait long."

"But, in the mean while, Leonard may cut my throat."

"Not if White Arm watches well. He has rightly guessed the object of the evil white chief. The latter fears the pale hunter. He has come like a leaf from the past, and, in order to guard against future trouble, Leonard would see him married to his daughter, thinking the tie will save him if White Arm ever knows the truth."

"But what if I decline to marry?"

"The Pawnee cannot say. Perhaps he would do you harm, but I think not. But he will not have the chance."

"Why not?"

"Because," said the Indian, lowering his voice to a whisper, "*Mountain Cat is on his trail!*"

"With what purpose?"

"To kill him!"

"What is to hinder you doing that any time?" asked Temple, a shade of doubt on his face.

"There are other things to be done first—"

The Pawnee ceased speaking as a rattling reached their ears, and they looked around just in time to see the Elk Rider dashing across the new bridge.

Mountain Cat wheeled and caught Temple's arm.

"We have said we would hunt down Lightning Bolt; our time has come!" he exclaimed.

"So be it!" Temple quickly answered. "I am under your lead; conduct the campaign as you see fit."

Before the last words were spoken, they were

on their way and following rapidly in the wake of the Giant Elk. The Pawnee struck into a run which compelled Temple to use every exertion to keep near him, and they almost flew over the ground.

Mountain Cat's blood was telling. He ran like a greyhound, his limbs playing gracefully and rapidly, and he went over boulders and chasms with surprising agility. Temple knew he could withstand this terrible pace but a few minutes, but he was not required to. As soon as they fairly lost sight of the quarry, the Pawnee relapsed into a walk.

"No use hurry any more," he observed. "After dis we hab to trail Elk Rider."

"Can you do it?"

"Pawnee not Blackfoot; Mountain Cat follow like dog; find Rider, sure, less he be spirit."

"Go on, then, and we will succeed if such a thing be possible. Of course we are not to fire at him."

"No burt!" was the quick response. "Take him alive, if at all. Me not sure, though."

Temple saw that the Indian was far from being full of confidence, but they had set their minds to the work and were both in earnest. Not for a moment did Temple allow himself to entertain the prevalent opinion that Lightning Bolt was a supernatural creature; being a sensible and practical man he was satisfied that only creatures of the flesh walked abroad on the earth.

Mountain Cat settled down to the work of trailing and showed that he had made no vain boast. In some places, where the ground was soft, the feet of the fast-going elk had left marks a child might have followed, but, anon, when the way became rocky and flint-like, the skill of the Pawnee was manifested.

Despite all their haste, their progress was comparatively slow. True they went rapidly at times, but, now and then, they came to a cleft in the earth which the Giant Elk had easily leaped, but where they were compelled to make an annoying detour to cross.

The tremendous power of the strange steed, as shown by his leaps and general stride, surprised Temple, but the explanation lay in the fact that the animal was the largest of his species ever known to be in Montana.

When they had gone half a mile beyond the river his pace moderated, and became merely a walk, though no time had been allowed to go to waste.

Mountain Cat's eyes brightened and he pressed on with renewed zeal and speed.

It was Temple's duty to watch by the way and his gaze constantly wandered over the mountain, seeking for a sight of the strange pair, but he looked for a long time in vain. Their way took them to the highest point of land near Quartz Rock, and they toiled upward until the village lay far below them and the river was merely a thread of silver stretched across the valley.

For some time they had gone in silence, but the red trailer, without lifting his gaze from the ground, finally spoke:

"Watch sharp, White Arm!"

"Are we gaining?"

"The trail is fresh. The pace of the Giant Elk has become a slow walk and he cannot be far away. Speak softly, brother, and beware of the fire-bolts."

For a moment the speaker's eyes were lifted to shoot a swift glance across the peak, and it was plain his Indian nature could not be wholly convinced that the Elk Rider was not a spirit. Ignorance and enlightenment were contending for supremacy.

Five minutes passed in silence and then an exclamation from Temple brought the Pawnee to a halt. The former had paused and stood with one hand extended toward the higher ground.

Lightning Bolt was again visible.

The strange being and his steed were on the brink of a precipice, the edge, as it were, of a table of rock. They faced the trailers, and the elk stood like a statue, his massive form and antlered head thrown into sharp prominence by the character of his surroundings.

His rider's attention was directed another way; it seemed that he was looking toward the village. His form, too, looked to be gigantic, and his peculiar dress—the tight fitting, plain cap and the monkish gown—was out of keeping with his form and full, flowing beard.

"Now is our time!" whispered Temple. "He does not see us and we may creep upon him unawares and—"

He paused as Mountain Cat dropped upon his hands and knees, sought the cover of the rocks and moved on their quarry. The white man imitated his example and they went forward as fast as was possible.

Now and then they glanced up and saw Lightning Bolt still on the cliff. He had removed his skull-cap, presumably to let the wind fan his forehead, and looked not unlike a hunter resting after the chase. But he did not dismount.

As they drew nearer both men became undeniably nervous. With Temple this was natural but the Pawnee was affected by superstition

which all his resolution could not wholly extinguish.

By making a half-circle they gained the same level as that occupied by their game. The point then became to creep on him silently and surely. Mountain Cat held his lasso ready and their hopes were strong.

One more advance, a deviation around a pyramid of rocks and the Pawnee would be ready for the cast.

They made the deviation as silently as specters and then paused in dismay.

Lightning Bolt was gone!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ELK RIDER'S CAVE.

MOUNTAIN CAT'S lasso fell from his hands and he remained staring blankly at where the Elk Rider had been. His air was that of a man who sees a ghost, but in his case he had seen one only to lose it.

"He is gone!" said Temple, in a tone of deep disappointment.

"He is a specter!" said the young Indian, in a hushed voice. "The Blackfeet are right; he is the Evil Spirit!"

"Nonsense! Don't let your superstitious fears return. He has gone away by natural means. Come; let us find the trail!"

"Did my brother hear him go?"

"No."

"Only a phantom could cross that rock and make no sound. The hard hoofs of a real elk would ring like the white man's rattle."

The speaker made a motion as though operating "bones." There did, indeed, seem sense in what he said, but Temple would not give up thus.

"I tell you there is not such a thing as a specter. Why will you let valuable time go to waste? Follow me, if you dare not lead."

He sprang out on the top of the rock and Mountain Cat reluctantly followed. They stood where Lightning Bolt had been a minute before, but where was he now?

A sound still further up the ascent attracted their attention and, looking, they saw the Giant Elk leisurely picking his way across the hillside. Lightning Bolt sat in his usual place, his manner calm and unmoved, his attention directed toward the front. If he was aware that he was being hunted, he gave no sign.

"Now is our time!" said Temple.

"Beware of the Elk Rider's death-bolts!" said the Pawnee, without stirring.

"Good Heavens! has your courage deserted you?"

"How did the Giant Elk change from here to there so quick?" stubbornly asked the Indian.

"He had time; believe me he had ample time. He made the change with great skill; I admit that; but there is nothing supernatural about it. Will you follow me, or shall I go alone?"

"Mountain Cat will go, and he will lead," was the answer, in a tone of unexpected firmness, "but if Lightning Bolt slays us both, do not blame the Pawnee."

Temple smiled slightly at the last remark, though he was not exactly as confident as he asserted. Man or spirit, the Elk Rider *did* have a somewhat remarkable faculty for making a change of base.

Mountain Cat resumed the work with almost reckless vigor. He was resolved to test the caliber of their quarry even though it was fatal to them both.

Leaping lightly from rock to rock, he ran in the direction where the mountain mystery had last been seen, striking a pace which Temple was troubled to imitate. They soon reached an elevated point of land, and again looked about for the elk and rider.

At first they saw nothing, but the Pawnee's keen eyes could not be long baffled, and he pointed toward the west. Their quarry was again visible, but, even as Temple looked, they disappeared where a great, black expanse broke the face of a cliff.

"A cave!" exclaimed Temple.

"Yes."

"If we go on now, we have him. He has taken to his lair, and will be at our mercy. Come!"

They went, and Mountain Cat again led the way, though the light in his dark eyes was one of undeniable fear. He would not turn back, but he thought their course the height of recklessness.

As they neared the mouth of the cave, however, even the white man became cautious. The idea was firmly fixed in his mind that Lightning Bolt warred only on the Blackfeet, but he did not care to tempt him by recklessly standing up as a target.

The Pawnee now showed his craft and crept forward like a serpent, keeping his person almost constantly protected by boulders. Temple found their mode of locomotion anything but easy, but he imitated the leader as far as was possible, and they soon gained a position as near the entrance as was safe.

It was a yawning hole in the rocks, looking not unlike the mouth of an artificial tunnel, but all beyond that was dark and uncertain. That the Elk Rider was inside seemed sure; that it

would be very risky for them to follow was even more obvious.

"What now?" Temple asked.

Mountain Cat silently shook his head.

"Shall we go in, or is it best to remain here and watch for him to reappear?"

The Indian hesitated for a moment, but all his pride was aroused, and, after a brief delay, he tersely answered:

"We go in!"

"So be it. I am ready to follow. We will hold our weapons ready, and, if driven to the wall, use them as best we can. I hope, however, we may not be obliged to fight."

Mountain Cat did not answer, but began crawling forward in the old way. In a few seconds he had passed the point of rock and was in the opening, exposed to the gaze of whoever might be inside, and to Lightning Bolt's peculiar mode of destruction.

Doubtless courage was then necessary.

Still they went on, pausing only to listen for some sign from the quarry, but utter silence reigned around them, and the feeble light which penetrated to the place prevented them from distinguishing anything except near at hand.

It was an experience never to be forgotten, and Temple found that there could be more trying danger than the facing of wild animals and boisterous roughs; but they retained their coolness and went forward.

They had gone, perhaps, a hundred feet when their further progress was barred by solid rock, where the cave seemed to end abruptly, and the same thought occurred to both.

The place had no tenant except themselves.

Still, they did not speak. The Elk Rider might be hovering in some dark shadow by the side of the cave, and they turned about and retraced their steps in the same cautious way.

Mountain Cat did not pause nor speak until they were outside. Then he spoke quietly.

"Lightning Bolt is not there!"

"Then, in the name of all that is remarkable, where is he? We plainly saw him enter the cave, and he could not have come out unseen by us."

"Spirits can go through solid rock."

Temple could not blame him for the remark, but it stirred him to fresh activity. Twilight was falling around them and it was necessary to do something soon if at all. He looked for and found a pine knot, and this he speedily converted into a torch.

The Pawnee watched with a grave face, but made no opposition, and when Temple moved forward he followed with his weapons ready for use.

The white man strode recklessly into the cave. The torch flared up brightly and illuminated the narrow cavity from side to side. If they had an enemy there, he would never have a better chance at them. But, though they went boldly through, no harm came of it and the fact was established that the Elk Rider was not there.

Mountain Cat secretly believed the fact established that the Rider was a creature of air—a spirit—but he had given his companion charge and would not interfere.

"The place has a secret unknown to us," said Temple, steadily, "and if it is the abiding-place of Lightning Bolt it is not to be wondered at. Of course he would not live where he could be easily found. The natural inference is that there is a passage out of the visible part of the cave; one concealed by these numerous piled-up rocks. He has gone on, and either left us entirely and crossed the mountain, or else there is a second chamber and he is now near us—perhaps even within sound of our voices."

The Indian started and looked nervously about, as though expecting to see the Elk Rider starting from the solid rock.

"Probably it would be a waste of time for us to try to find the precise rock which must be moved to learn where he has gone," resumed Temple, "so we will not try it. Have you the patience to make a night of it outside the entrance and watch for him?"

"Dat much better dan to hunt for him," said Mountain Cat, with alacrity.

"So be it, then. Choose the place, and we will take turns at watching. No one knows what the night may bring forth."

The Pawnee selected the proper place outside, and then they ate supper from the supply of meat he had in his pouch. Nothing more was seen or heard of the Elk Rider. Temple began to think their present venture would amount to nothing; but as it had become too dark to continue the hunt, it was just as well to take the one chance open to them.

So they settled down "to make a night of it," as he had well expressed it, and the hours passed slowly on. As nothing occurred to break the monotony of their watch, we need not comment upon it.

Morning broke at last, and Temple, who had been asleep for two hours, was aroused by his companion. He felt a little vexed with Mountain Cat for not allowing him to do his share of the work, but the latter was satisfied.

Once more they entered the cave, but it was

as they had left it on the previous evening, and there was no sign of Lightning Bolt and his steed.

"We may as well make the best of the inevitable," said Temple. "We have lost our game, and if we can't regain sight of him, are no better off than when we left the village."

"You stay here and watch little longer; me go round de hill an' see if me find trail. Soon tell if Evil Spirit left hill."

The Indian went away, and Temple sat looking at vacancy in a thoughtful way. Was he doing well to trouble himself about the Elk Rider? So far the man had never done him harm, but he had a habit of slaying right and left when he set out about it, and might make a victim of even a white man if he was molested.

While thus thinking, the young man was aroused by the rattling of a stone some distance away. Thinking it might be the Pawnee he directed his gaze in that direction, but instead, he once more saw Lightning Bolt dashing recklessly along upon his elk steed.

This time, however, the animal bore a double burden; Lightning Bolt held a dead or insensible woman in his arms, and as Waldo Temple caught a clear view of her face he uttered a sharp cry.

He had recognized the woman; it was Missouri, the ferry-girl!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISSOURI AND THE ELK RIDER.

JACK PURCELL was a man not easily kept down, and his repeated defeats only served to make him the more determined to succeed in the work he had marked out—that is, to marry pretty Missouri, and to reduce Temple below the level of rivalry, even though he had to set a score of murderous traps to do it.

Neither he nor Mike Mulloy was in condition to be at the bridge-opening. Mike had a pair of highly-colored black eyes, the result of Temple's iron blows, and certain bruises on Jack's face were ascribable to the same cause.

As a result, they remained in-doors and plotted mischief. To use Jack's own elaborate expression, they "put a rod in pickle for Temple," while he planned to have speedier trouble fall on the ferry-girl.

That evening she intended to remain at the Brown Hand as late as usual, although no one had crossed the ferry since the bridge was finished. Over at The Hearthstone the citizens were still holding revel over the marvelous event, and one would have thought a new Eldorado was discovered.

"By golly!" said G. Wash Adams, "I's afeerd, Miss Soo, dat we'll hab ter pack our sapsack an' git out o' hyar. Dis nigger neber 'arned his bread wid de sweat ob idleness, an' 'ears like he neber will. Dar'll be a corner in de money market pooty quick ef somebody don't come 'long an' disburse a shiner."

"Do not worry about early frosts, Wash," his mistress coolly answered.

"Golly! dis am a reg'lar ole freeze-out; ground froz d'leven inches under der stratum ob de y'arth. 'Spect old Fair-an'-sweet neber invented a thermometer dat would measure 'um."

"We's got ter git out o' Quartz Rock, sure 'nuff," added T. Jeff Adams.

"Don't be so sure of that. Do you want to bet a month's wages that Brown Hand won't be running as usual before a month, and taking all the custom away from the bridge?"

The negroes looked in surprise, but did not hasten to bet.

"Isaac Leonard hasn't killed the Brown Hand Ferry yet," calmly added Missouri. "I am still putting our line against the bridge."

"But nobody won't ride, Miss Soo."

"They'll be glad to ride one of these days," she quietly answered. "I shall retain you both, and pay you regularly, and the people will yet be led to see this is the only safe and reliable line. Ah! here comes a passenger now!"

A single man came hastily down to the pier.

"I want to cross as quick as I can," he said, nervously looking at his watch. "I have forgotten something."

"Step right aboard, sir," said Missouri, calmly.

He obeyed, she dipped her oars and the boat shot toward the Southern shore.

"Wonder why he didn't take de bridge?" Jeff asked, of his brother.

"Dunno. Did ye know him?"

"No."

"Nur me. Must be he's a new rival. Wal, I reckon I'll lay down an' take a sleep. Wake me up ef I'm wanted."

Jeff did not answer, but looked a little doubtfully after the smaller boat. Somehow, he did not feel easy about the matter.

Missouri, however, had no thought of danger, and she drove the boat cheerily across until it touched the bank. Up to that time the passenger had sat silent and motionless, his face turned toward the south, but when the journey was ended he arose as though to step ashore.

Instead, he suddenly wheeled and caught Missouri in his arms, pressing one hand over her

mouth, while a slight whistle was enough to bring two other men into view from behind the cover of neighboring bowlders.

"Bear a hand, men!" said the late passenger, holding the girl, despite her struggles. "We want to get out of this as soon as possible. Lift her up—so!—and we'll take her a short distance before we try to do any binding. If I let her have her mouth she would scream like a catamount."

His order was obeyed and, against such odds, Missouri struggled in vain. She was taken far enough so there was no chance of the negroes coming to her aid, and then the abductors paused. Their identity was no longer a matter of doubt to the girl; they were Mike Mulloy, Tom Todd and Purcell. It was the latter, who, in disguise, had decoyed her over the ferry.

"Now, my dear," he said, mockingly, "I am about to remove my hand from your mouth. I trust you will not be so foolish as to scream; it would do you no good and, though so distinctively a woman's accomplishment, is in very bad taste."

He stepped back at the last word.

"Don't imagine I care for your opinion, Jack Purcell, one way or the other!" she retorted. "Men who steal women are not worth thinking about."

"I'll bet even money you devote four-fifths of your time to me, when thinking, from this time out. You see, my dear, my courtship didn't seem to progress as I could wish, so I have adopted the good, old-fashioned way of abducting you. Up among the rocks, where I have a quiet den, we can talk about the silver moon, the timid flowers and the beautiful snow, as all lovers do, and all will be lovely and the goose suspended at an elevated attitude. Do you see, my dear?"

"I warn you, Jack Purcell, to let me alone. I am no bread-and-water school-girl, and if you try to carry a heavy hand, I will kill you as I would a snake. I know you as you are—gambler, assassin and woman-stealer—and I will be as merciless as you may yourself prove."

"Your remarks will be duly published in the Congressional Report, fair Soo; in fact, I may say we will put them on ice. As for your charming self, I have too long schemed for you to throw away my success in the hour of its birth. Go with us you must, and it only remains to be seen whether you go quietly, with good usage, or the reverse."

He was as deaf to pleadings as the senseless rocks; and as Missouri feared to make her treatment even more rigorous by useless resistance, she yielded to the inevitable and went along quietly.

Todd was soon dismissed, but the prisoner was conducted along between the remaining men until Quartz Rock was left far behind and they were well up on the side of a peak which lay southwest of the town.

Missouri had long since refused to speak even a word, and silence had fallen over the party; but she was planning a way of escape. She was resolved not to be led into any den by her enemy, and on the mountain, and under cover of night, there was really some hope of eluding him. She only delayed the attempt because he was gradually losing his old air of watchfulness.

Once or twice they had paused for breath, and she resolved to make use of the next chance. It came when they paused on a sort of mountain-table, with a steep ascent beyond.

Mulloy dropped on the ground, but Purcell, leaning on his rifle, looked thoughtfully back to where he could dimly see the village lights.

This was the scene when a sudden pounding, rattling sound broke upon their ears, and they looked up suddenly.

What they saw held each one momentarily speechless.

A dark object was dashing forward at full speed, and it needed but one glance to recognize Lightning Bolt and his Giant Elk!

The strange twain were sweeping directly toward them, and there even seemed danger of being run down.

Mulloy was the first to recover the power of locomotion, and he made a dash to get away with such frantic haste that he tripped and fell headlong.

Purcell was not more anxious to stay, and he turned to follow his ally.

Then Missouri, standing as though turned to stone, felt the earth flung into her face from the plunging hoofs of the elk, and in a moment more Lightning Bolt stooped down, caught her around the waist and lifted her to the elk's back.

She grew confused and dizzy, but she left fainting for her more weakly sisters. She was in the arms of the scourge of the foothills, but he made no movement toward injuring her, and at the worst she had only changed captors.

The Giant Elk had not perceptibly slackened his speed when the additional passenger was taken up, nor did he seem inconvenienced by the load; but, at a gentle trot, he went through canyons where the footing was good, and never seemed at a loss.

Purcell and his men had dropped out of the

case, and Soo rapidly regained her usual courage. She looked at the Rider, and wished to address him, but she did not know what words to use.

On his own part, he did not seem to once look at her, but the hold of his arms was gentle, though secure, and he seemed little like a pitiless avenger.

For the twentieth time, Missouri was trying to find speech, when they entered a dark cavity which was plainly a cave. Where were they going? She remembered the assertions of the superstitious people of Quartz Rock that Lightning Bolt was a fiend unloosed from purgatory, and the possibility that she might be on her way to that abode of woe, made a shiver run through her body.

Her companion started.

"Are you afraid, my child? I had almost forgotten you were here. Do not be alarmed, for I will protect you."

The voice was gentle; the words were English. And this was the foothills' monster!

Missouri was greatly encouraged, but she was not content to let the conversation drop, now it was once begun.

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, but where are we going?" she asked.

"To one of my many mountain resorts. You will find it dry, spacious and comfortable, and Samson and I will guard you."

"Samson?"

"My elk. But here we are in the retreat; let us dismount, and I will get a light and show you how I live."

He slid to what seemed solid rock, and placed Missouri on her feet. Then he went several feet away, and seemed busy with getting a light. The girl did not see anything to hinder her from leaving the place, and bidding a permanent adieu to Lightning Bolt, but she resolved to remain. He had saved her from Purcell, and seemed like anything but a monster.

A light soon flamed up, and Missouri saw a room fashioned almost wholly by nature from the rock, with no occupants save herself and the strange master of the place; but she was at once struck by one peculiarity.

There was no opening to show where they had entered; the place seemed to be of solid rock. What did it mean? How had they passed through the unbroken surface of the cave?

CHAPTER XXIX.

LIGHTNING BOLT AT HOME.

THE girl's surprise was expressed on her face, and the Elk Rider smiled gravely.

"You are looking for the place through which we entered?"

"Yes," she confessed.

"It closed after us. That is one peculiarity of the lairs which I inhabit. There is a plate of rock set in the floor which, when Samson stepped upon it, operated a spring which caused the wall to recede. When we entered it swung back into place, and one standing on the outside would never suspect a sub-cave was here."

Missouri did not know whether to commend such ingenuity or look upon it as the proof of a cunning which was dangerous to her, but, after a brief pause, Lightning Bolt resumed, in a half-absent manner:

"In bringing you here I have done what I never did before—I have brought an outsider to my home. I did this under the impulse of the moment. I knew the man with whom you were your enemy, and, when I chanced upon you, I suspected he had abducted you. Consequently, I rescued you, and when it was done, forgot all about you until we reached the cave."

Such forgetfulness did not speak well for his mental condition, but his manner remained kind and gentle and Missouri summoned courage and answered:

"Purcell did abduct me, and I am very grateful to you."

"You are welcome to my home, and I will only ask that you say nothing to the village people. They regard me as a supernatural creature, and I have no desire to change their belief until—until my work is done."

"Rest assured, sir, I will not betray you."

"I will try and make you comfortable for the night, and in the morning you shall go to your friends."

He then went toward the elk and removed the saddle from his back. All of the ferry-girl's courage was returning and she looked at Samson with admiration. Such a mountain of flesh she had never before seen in one of his kind. Noticing her attention, Lightning Bolt invited her to approach, and she found the Giant Elk as gentle as a dog. She caressed his neck, and his great eyes seemed almost to express human intelligence.

"He is a noble fellow!" she could not help saying.

"You are right," his master answered, his eyes lighting up with pride. "There is no other steed like Samson. I captured him when he was young and have trained him as the Laplanders train reindeer for their sledges, except that, being my sole companion, he has had con-

stant attention and is, really, a human being, except that he cannot talk."

He rested his hand on the elk's neck, and master and steed looked at each other with friendly eyes. Noticing his strong limbs, swelling chest and shapely body, Soo no longer wondered that he was able to dash over the mountain in a way which the people had thought unearthly.

"Is he always gentle?" she asked.

"Always, except when we go into battle; then he will fight like a demon. Bounding Bison and his warriors know that to their cost. Many a man has he trod under his hard hoofs. Look at them! He can strike a terrible blow."

The girl, remembering the red tales of the twain, could not avoid a shiver.

"Why do you war upon the Blackfeet?" she asked.

A wild light appeared in the man's eyes.

"Because they are my enemies; because I seek vengeance. What is Bounding Bison? A white man in the dress of an Indian, one who has done me and mine great harm. Some day he shall fall by my hand. The day would have come before now, but I wished to make him shiver among all his outlaw braves before ending the feud. There are wrongs in this world, child, which man is reluctant to leave to an after punishment. Mine is of that kind, and, going forth on the trail of destruction, I have made a name at the sound of which my enemies grow pale!"

He stretched out his right arm, his face was hard and stern, his eyes gleamed with a wild light, and the vehemence of his utterance told of strong passion.

Missouri began to feel fresh fear, but his mood suddenly changed.

"Why do I speak of these things to you? Woman's nature is kind and gentle, and the ways of revenge and hatred are not her ways. This I know, for I once had a home over which a woman presided like a spirit of good— But, enough of this; I am talking too much. Yonder is a chair, girl; make yourself as comfortable as my humble home will allow."

He then began to prepare his supper from the meat of a mountain-sheep, and Missouri volunteered her aid and, naturally, did the greater part of the work.

The Elk Rider leaned against the wall and watched her, and his broad face grew sad. It was the first time in many years that a woman had performed like labor for him, and it doubtless brought back recollections of happier days.

Missouri longed to learn more about him, but he evaded her diffident inquiries and she was wise enough not to press the matter. He made a kind and courteous host, though now and then the former gleam in his eyes told that he was slightly deranged mentally.

The lair was of two parts, one of which was usually occupied only by Samson, but on this occasion the Rider put the larger room at his guest's disposal and retired to the smaller with his elk steed.

The night—the strangest of Missouri's life—passed without further incident, and the girl had such a confidence that she was comparatively safe that she slept soundly for several hours.

In the morning Lightning Bolt reappeared and greeted her with his former manner, nor had he forgotten his promise to take her back to Quartz Rock. She prepared breakfast, and this time ate with him, not forgetting to show some attention to Samson.

As a preliminary step to leaving the place, her host opened the secret door which led to the outer, and visible, cave, and Soo admired the ease with which it worked, even while she was at a loss to understand its ingenious workmanship. The secret, however, lay in a series of concealed springs and levers, which moved a part of the rock. Samson could operate the construction with his weight, or Lightning Bolt with his hands, but no stranger could do it.

The girl was not surprised; it was only in keeping with his skill in making his fire-bolts; and she comprehended that his natural ingenuity had been aided by a slightly deranged mind, thus combining inherited skill with insane cunning.

The sunshine looked so pleasant outside the cave that Missouri strayed that way while Lightning Bolt was saddling Samson. The morning was bright and peaceful, with a clear atmosphere which enabled her to look a long distance, and she could see Quartz Rock and the river, each looking like a fragment from a land of dwarfs.

While she stood thus she did not know that she was in turn observed, and that, too, by eyes which gleamed hostility; her first warning came when several men—Blackfoot Indians—sprung from the cover of the rocks upon her.

Before she could turn she was in their hands. She uttered one cry for help, and then a broad hand was closed over her neck and then savages darted away, two of them bearing her weight.

Her struggles were wholly useless, and the grasp on her throat was suffocating. She gasped, her senses reeled and then deserted her.

But she was not forgotten.

A terrible shout arose from behind the ab-

ductors, and as they looked around Lightning Bolt came sweeping toward them, the Giant Elk making most tremendous bounds.

Cries of alarm arose from the Indians.

"The Evil Spirit!" they exclaimed, in chorus, and then each one fled in terror.

In this wild stampede Missouri was dropped to the ground, where she lay white and senseless, but all was working for the best. At her side the pursuer checked his flying steed and sprung to the ground. He lifted the motionless girl and regained the saddle, but could she have seen him then she might well have feared. His usually calm face was distorted with passion and his eyes gleamed with a terrible light.

Holding her securely on his left arm, he gave Samson the word and the noble elk dashed after the Blackfeet, who were still in flight. Samson's bounds soon cut down the intervening distance, and, as the fugitives unexpectedly reached the edge of a precipice, they uttered fresh cries of alarm.

The Elk Rider's right hand sought the folds of his gown, and then came out holding two round objects a trifle smaller than baseballs, but with a rough surface, as though covered with wool, or something similar.

One of these he hurled at the Blackfeet. Scarcely had it left his hand before it began to blaze, and again the Indians cried out with alarm.

Possibly the distance was too short for the purpose of the bomb—as it seemed to be—for it passed them before exploding and only one man was injured. He reeled and fell over the cliff just at the moment when Lightning Bolt, continuing his course, hurled another missile of destruction.

This was truer than the other, and what were left of the Blackfeet turned and fled, leaving two of their number prostrate on the ground. The Elk Rider had scored another deadly victory over his enemies.

On his own part, he continued his way at a moderate speed. The battle fire had not died out of his eyes, and though he held Missouri safely he was, really, unconscious of her presence.

He was on his way to another of his lairs—the same where we have seen Waldo Temple and Mountain Cat watch for him—but as he neared it he observed a man at the entrance. This was Temple, waiting for the Mountain Cat to make the circuit of the hill.

At sight of him a fresh wildness seized Lightning Bolt and he started Samson into a wild burst of speed.

It was at this moment that the young man looked up and saw the Giant Elk with his double burden, and seeing, recognized Soo. But, as Temple reeled back with horror, Lightning Bolt went recklessly on his way.

He rode, perhaps, a quarter of a mile, and then paused on an elevated point and looked back. Slowly he raised his free hand and drew it across his forehead. It was as though his mind was in confusion and he was trying to clear it.

Several minutes passed. He did not notice that Missouri was fast recovering consciousness, but, still looking back, he saw Temple and Pawnee steadily following his trail, their manner full of stubborn resolution.

The Elk Rider's face grew hard and stern, and he drew another of his fire-bolts from his robe.

CHAPTER XXX.

TEMPLE IS ARRESTED.

SMALL events sometimes change the entire development of affairs.

Just as Lightning Bolt held the deadly missile and was only waiting until the trailers came near enough to make a cast of any avail, Missouri suddenly stirred in his arms, gasped and sat erect.

The Elk Rider started and suddenly became aware that he was not alone.

"Oh! is it you?" Soo joyfully exclaimed. "How did you rescue me from the Blackfeet?"

"I really don't know," he said, frowning thoughtfully. "I heard your cry for help and ran out of the cave; I remember no more until I found myself here with you in my arms. My mind often wanders thus."

"Well, it is certain you have again rescued me from my enemies. How can I ever thank you enough?"

"Your gratitude is all I desire, child," he answered, his voice trembling a little. "I have only done what I could wish others to do to my own loved ones, if they were alive. But, never mind. Look below us, at those two men! Do you recognize them?"

Missouri uttered a cry of joy. "It is Mr. Temple and the Mountain Cat!" she exclaimed.

"They are your friends?"

"Yes, and they will be yours, too—"

"No, my child; I do not want friends; I am an avenger. It is long since I have spoken in friendship to any one except you, but I am glad to have been able to help you. Now, I will leave you here, since your friends will soon arrive. Say to them, from me, that it is useless to hunt a will-o'-the-wisp."

He set her gently on the ground.

"But when shall I see you again?" she asked. "Perhaps never! No one can tell what a day will bring forth for the wild wanderer of the hills. Leave him to his barren life, child, and keep close to your own peaceful one; but, when you hear the name of Lightning Bolt shivering spoken, you, at least, will know he is not all a demon. Say nothing of this adventure to any one except your two friends, but be sure I am always your friend. Farewell!"

He touched Samson lightly and the elk started off at a trot. One minute the pair were visible, and then intervening rocks hid them from view.

He had barely disappeared when Temple and the Pawnee came into view from out the canyon. They had not previously seen her since the Elk Rider was bearing her away, and it was a most welcome surprise.

Temple's set, somber face grew suddenly bright.

Missouri would have been a stoic had she not also been pleased, and she advanced with extended hands, while her face and eyes so operated upon her lover that he threw prudence to the winds and caught her in his arms.

Mountain Cat nodded with approval, and pretended to be busy with his rifle.

The first few minutes which followed were so improved with incoherent conversation that we will not attempt to describe them; but in the course of time all became sufficiently calm, so that the girl told the story of her adventures, greatly to the astonishment of her hearers.

The men looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then Temple broke into a laugh.

"What do you think of your 'spirit,' now?"

"Him man!" the Pawnee acknowledged. "Me not afraid to hunt him now."

"You shall not hunt him!" declared Missouri. "He has been my best friend, and he shall not be harmed."

"Listen, white sister!" the young Indian replied. "I have never been his enemy. I came to Montana on a trail of vengeance, with my heart bitter against the Blackfeet. When I arrived I found they had an enemy in Lightning Bolt. Wherever I moved I found that his trail crossed the other, and my mind was turned to him. Then White Arm and I spoke of hunting him down, not as foes, but to see what he was. The Elk Rider has never harmed me, and now that he has helped my sister he is my friend. My cross-trail shall hereafter be with enmity for the Blackfeet and friendship for Lightning Bolt."

"Rest assured, we will not attempt to do him harm," added Temple; "but I hope chance will make it possible for me to learn more about him. He seems to be a man driven partially insane by wrongs, and all his hatred has turned against Bounding Bison's band. For that, I cannot blame him."

There was a good deal more to be said, but they concluded it was best to say it on the way to Quartz Rock. Missouri insisted on returning, and using extra precautions for her safety thereafter; and when she had explained her reasons, Temple reluctantly agreed.

For his own part, he would rather have left the vicinity at once; but as he could not change her resolution, he would not go alone.

"Before many days," she said, "Isaac Leonard will have seen that his bridge over the river is of no use, and that the Brown Hand Ferry is the only reliable means of crossing. When I have triumphed over him, I am ready to leave Quartz Rock."

The girl little knew what the future had in store for her.

Perhaps it would not be out of place to say, parenthetically, as it were, that during the journey Temple and Soo came to a complete understanding, and they parted engaged lovers.

On reaching the Brown Hand they found the Adams brothers at the pier, and their utter dismay was changed to uproarious joy when they saw their beloved mistress safely back.

She remained at the ferry, the Mountain Cat went his way, and Temple walked over to the Hearthstone Hotel.

There he found Gaffer Golightly and Beriah Brown in consultation.

"Wal, by thunder! hyar you be!" observed Gaffer. "I was jest considerin' ther expediency o' goin' ter hunt ye up. You are gettin' ter be ez onreliable ez a jumpin'-jack—I can't tell which way you'll jump. 'Riah an' me was gettin' worried."

"By mightiation! thar is need o' worry 'round hyar," added the miner. "Things is gettin' mixed up so 't I can't tell X from Z, although I'm a highly eddicated man. Eddication is common ter all ther Browns—Brown, without aly 'e'."

"I want ter be putt to work," continued Golightly. "Et don't come nat'ral ter me ter be a hired man, an' do nothin'."

As soon as Temple had a chance he stated that he would have a talk with both men as soon as he had breakfasted. He intended that, from that time, one of them should all the while watch over Missouri—unknown to her.

Leaving them, he ordered and ate breakfast.

He was just finishing, when two burly men walked up to him.

"My name is Mouse," said one of the two, "an' I hev been a p'inted sheriff o' ther town. I hev a warrant ter arrest you!"

"To arrest me!" echoed Temple.

"Ther same."

"On what charge?"

"Salt battery, I b'lieve they call it, on one J. Purcell, Esquire. Anyhow, you're charged with hammerin' him all inter an uncooked sausage, with no seasonin'."

The state of affairs needed no explanation; Temple perceived that his rival had played a trump card, and certainly won one point in the game. He also knew it would be useless to appeal to Sheriff Mouse.

"I would like to see Mr. Leonard before you shut me up," he said quietly.

"Can't be did, but I hev no objection ter yer seein' him arterwards. I'll send a messenger immejiate ter tell him you want ter see him."

Mouse spoke more kindly than was to be expected, and Temple accepted the inevitable as gracefully as possible. He left word for Gaffer as to what had happened, and then followed the sheriff.

He was conducted to a room in one of the larger houses, which he judged had been arranged for his special use, and left alone. It was a dismal place to remain in, for the furniture was limited to a pair of chairs from which the backs had been broken, and the bare floor did not even have a blanket in the way of a bed.

The prisoner did not at once notice this, however; he was wondering what would be the result of his imprisonment. Knowing Leonard was the supreme authority of the town, he had a suspicion that but for him he would not have been arrested.

Was the "assault" on Purcell made an excuse for means to bend his will to the Leonards' wishes?

"If so, they must be desperately in earnest to marry me to Agnes. Now, then, what is the reason? What episode of the past, of which I know nothing, influences the ruler of Quartz Rock? I am not aware of any great event in my past, nor that of my parents, which will explain the matter. Why did I permit the Mountain Cat to remain silent? He knows something about the chained eagle—he says Leonard has the same figure on his arm—and I suspect the Indian could tell enough to enlighten me. I'm afraid he has kept his secret too long!"

He was thinking bitterly of the Pawnee when the door was unlocked. He looked up, hoping to see Isaac Leonard, but saw, instead—Agnes!

She entered quickly, and the door was closed behind her; and then she advanced, with her beautiful face expressing the deepest sympathy.

"Mr. Temple!" she explained, extending both hands.

He clasped them gravely.

"I see I am not wholly forgotten in my captivity."

"Oh! how sorry I am; it is a shame! Father was not at the house when the messenger arrived, and I at once came down instead. I was shocked and indignant when I heard of it."

"I must confess I felt the same way myself. Having never been under lock and key before, it troubles my nerves slightly."

"You shall be released; I will see to it myself. One of my friends shall not be used thus."

"I hope that Mr. Purcell's injured feelings—and head—may be healed by the payment of some fine," said Temple, who was willing to encourage her to talk.

"Unfortunately, it comes at a very bad time. Father has tried to preserve order without the machinery of law, but the people demanded what they called their rights, and you are the first victim. They are bitter against you because you are a visitor, instead of a citizen."

"Yet they seem determined to keep me."

"Something must be done."

"That's a fact."

"Father was saying he had taken steps to get you into business here—he did not say how, exactly—and if you really was in business, they would be obliged to let you go."

"Yes; Mr. Leonard suggested that I go into partnership with some one."

Agnes clapped her hands in a childish way.

"That is a capital idea. If you went into business and—should marry some nice girl, they would not dare molest you further!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ISAAC LEONARD SPEAKS PLAINLY.

ALL the fair Agnes's arts did not suffice to conceal her systematic purpose. The hook showed beneath the bait.

If Waldo Temple had doubted before, he was now sure, and he could almost have sworn the Leonards were parties to his arrest, and that Agnes had come instead of her father, according to a pre-arranged plan.

When she presented the importance to him of marriage, he could not avoid seeing what she meant. She had even feigned a modest confusion, and if she did not blush, it was an oversight on her part.

"It might not be so easy to find the 'nice

girl' who would marry me," he cautiously answered, to her last remark.

"No trouble about that," said the beauty, with assumed coquettishness. "Young and handsome men are not so plenty here that they need fear refusal."

Temple began to be alarmed. In his endeavor to make her betray herself, he had walked on very thin ice, metaphorically speaking, and would fall through unless he was careful.

"Well, I will consider the matter," he gravely replied.

"Of course father and I shall do all we can for you, for you have been a guest at our house and—and we are interested in you."

"That is very kind, Miss Leonard."

"The only trouble will be that you are a visitor to the town, not a citizen."

"If I take out my naturalization papers, as it were, it would make a difference?"

"Oh! I am sure we could arrange everything, then."

Agnes's manner was as bland as a spring morning; but, despite her gentle purring, it was plain the Leonards meant to either take Temple into the happy family, or give him a taste of prison discipline which would, sooner or later, they hoped, make him glad to become a citizen and a Benedict.

The young lady remained for some time longer, and her ill-concealed tenderness would have delighted a lover. While feigning innocent friendship, she pushed the courtship as a besieging army moves upon a beleaguered citadel.

The remainder of the conversation need not be given in detail, but Temple tried to do his part in a becoming manner. It would have been far more to his taste to let the beauty see that he understood her arts, but a captive cannot wisely be defiant, and he did not say anything rash.

When the call had been prolonged as far as was possible, she bade him a very friendly adieu, and returned to the parental roof. There she found Isaac Leonard smoking a cigar.

"Well, what luck?" he quickly asked.

The girl did not answer until she had thrown off her outer garments and taken a seat.

"I'll be shot if I know!" was her elegant reply.

"What do you mean by that?"

"He was non-committal. He certainly did not fall into my arms, nor seem to take the hint; but he was friendly enough. At times I had a vague suspicion he was playing with me; but I don't know. He's a deep one!"

"He is not in a position to put on airs. Thanks to the trouble with Purcell, we have him in a corner where we can turn the screws head down, and the people can't complain, and I swear by all that's holy he don't come out of there alive unless he consents to become your husband!"

"You're a treasure, old man!" Agnes coarsely exclaimed. "If everybody made love your way, there would be few broken hearts."

She then gave a detailed account of her visit. "In my opinion, he knows our game and means to be stubborn," said Leonard, frowning. "I'll send word to have the jailer neglect to give him anything to eat, and he shall be left wholly alone until evening. Then, I'll go in as a sympathizing friend, and if he don't come to time I'll speak plainly. He shall remain in Quartz Rock, above the sod or below it!"

The schemer spoke with a venomous air which left no doubt of his sincerity.

When Temple was left alone he sat down on one of the broken-backed chairs, and relapsed into meditation.

"Just as I thought; the Leonards are in the game, and they mean to take me to their fold, by fair means or foul. What will happen if I decline to become Mr. Agnes Leonard, I don't know, but I call it an unfair advantage to take of a bachelor. I am free to acknowledge that matrimony is a good thing, and can't be improved upon by modern amendments, but it's one of the cases where every man wants to take his pick. I'll wait for the next move in the game."

He had some time to wait. Noon came; no dinner, no visitors. Twilight arrived; no supper, no visitors. Several times he had knocked upon the door, and kicked it hard enough to have driven out ordinary panels, but no attention was paid to his disturbance.

By the time the door was unlocked, he was in a savage mood, and when Leonard appeared he only looked at him sullenly.

"My dear fellow," said the great man, advancing with his hand extended, "I am very sorry to see you here. I have been away all day and only just returned. I regret this matter very much, but I hope you are not taking it too much to heart."

"What I am the most anxious to take is something to eat," Temple sulkily said.

"What! haven't you had any supper?"

"No, nor dinner."

"Good heavens! have they neglected you so! I will see to it, at once."

He hammered at the door until the jailer re-

appeared, and a steaming supper was soon set before the prisoner. Being confident he owed his involuntary abstinence to Isaac Leonard, he did not take the trouble to thank him, but fell to with a will, nor did he eat less heartily because his visitor filled in the blanks with abuse of the jailer.

But Temple was not easily deceived.

When the meal was finished, Leonard drew his broken chair closer to his intended victim.

"Now, my dear Temple, let us speak of your own case. When I heard of it, I ordered you to be released at once, but ten of the men of the town waited on me in a body and warned me not to attempt it. They say I shall no longer be the sole authority in Quartz Rock; that the town must hereafter be regularly governed; and they are very bitter against you. They say you, a stranger, have assaulted men of the town and they vow they will make an example of you."

"I would like to see these men."

"Unluckily, they will compel you to see them."

"Just what I want. Are they aware that the so-called assault on Purcell occurred when, aided by Mulloy and Todd, he was trying to kill me?"

"Ah! Purcell denies it, and they believe his story."

"Do you?"

"Certainly not; I believe your version."

"Well, is the word of a ruffian like Purcell to go ahead of mine?"

"I am going to try to prevent it, but I find I am not all-powerful here, and as I can't openly defy the whole town, we must resort to stratagem. I told you the other day that I had received letters hostile to you, and suggested, as an offset, that you become my partner in the mine. Those were the first mutterings of the storm which has since burst, but I am still able to save you by the device mentioned."

"The partnership?"

"Yes. They dare not war on a regularly admitted member of our society. Now, as I once before said to you, the citizens of Quartz Rock are sure to some day become millionaires, and, in all friendliness, I would say your best way is to join us, marry some deserving girl and share our prosperity."

"I would like to see, and talk to, these turbulent citizens," said Temple, who was pretty sure they were far from being turbulent.

"You shall, if you wish, but it must be done cautiously. There have even been threats of lynching, and the men are resolved to carry their point. I have tried to maintain order without the machinery of the law, but the men took a fancy to demand what they call their rights, and as you are the first example it is a desperate case."

Temple was duly impressed by the recollection that Agnes had used almost the same expressions as were contained in the last sentence. He had thought them unnaturally heavy for her, at the time, but he could now see their source.

He began to feel intense indignation.

"Well, suppose I accept the partnership, who am I to marry?" he resumed.

"Well," answered Leonard, with a bland smile, "if you and Agnes could agree, I should not refuse to accept you for a son-in-law!"

"Perhaps Agnes despises me."

"I am sure she regards you very highly."

"Have you asked her?"

"Certainly not, but I can read—"

"So can I!" interrupted the prisoner, no longer able to restrain his indignation. "If you imagine, Isaac Leonard, that you can blind me to the facts of this case you are very much mistaken. From the time I first entered Quartz Rock, you and your daughter have been trying, for some unknown reason, to drive me into matrimony, and this arrest is but your last desperate move in the game. You are resolved to marry Agnes to me; all your scheming, lying and crawling cannot hide the truth; but I hereby announce to you that I will grow gray in jail before I will join my future to such a woman, or call such a plotting old rascal as you my father-in-law!"

The deed was done; for weal or woe Temple had cast off his mask and torn away that of his enemy; and from that day there was to be no fawning upon him.

What would take its place?

Isaac Leonard arose and, for a moment, stood staring blankly at the bold young man. No one had dared address a disrespectful word to him before for years. The color had retreated from his face, his eyes had a wild, glassy look, and twice he essayed to speak before a sound left his throat.

"You are mad!" he finally said, huskily:

"I may be mad, but I am no longer your dupe!" Temple retorted, in a ringing voice.

"Beware, sir! I am not one to tamely bear insult!"

"I know you and your way, but I defy you. I am held prisoner here by your order, as a part of your scheme against me, but I refuse to cringe to you. There is the door, sir; be so good as to take your face out of my sight. Such a man as you pollutes the air he breathes!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

MOUNTAIN CAT MAKES A VISIT.

SILENCE reigned for a moment in the prison-room, but Isaac Leonard was not the man to remain cool under such a crushing accusation as this. He could act the polite fawner when his intended victim was ignorant of his intentions and talked in a friendly way in return; but, before such language as he had just heard, he lost all control of his temper.

"By the shades of perdition!" he hissed, "you shall repent this to your dying hour. You have scorned me now, but I will make you howl like a wounded dog and beg my pardon on your bended knees. I will drag you from one end of the town to the other, through mud and mire, and when you are dying like a singed wolf I will stand by and laugh at you! I am supreme ruler of Quartz Rock, my voice is heard but to be obeyed—"

"Oh! then the 'rights' demanded by the citizens was a myth, was it?"

"Mercy is a myth, with me, as I will show you to your cost. It was an evil hour when you decided to defy me; I will make you beg for death as a favor. Remember this, and be sure when I come again I will not come with the generous offer I have before made. My next appearance means death to you!"

At the last word the man wheeled and strode from the cell. One moment after the door was relocked the ringing of his steps was audible, and then the prisoner was left to silence and his own thoughts. He arose and paced the room. He knew he had done a rash thing and—he regretted it; but the hypocrisy of the visitor had urged him on to recklessness.

What would be the result? It was hard to say, but, through the one barred window of his cell, came a dismal moaning of the wind which seemed to answer:

"Death! death!"

In the mean while Leonard was striding home, his mind in keeping with the weather, for over the sky had gathered dark, heavy clouds, plainly rain-surcharged, and heralding speedy rain. The wind crept down from the mountain passes with a moan which rose and fell like the tone of an organ, or whistled around the cabins in fitful gusts.

Nature was gathering its forces for an outburst.

Leonard's were already gathered, and he strode into the presence of his daughter with a manner which brought her to her feet in dismay.

"Have you failed?"

"Failed! I have met a Waterloo."

"And he declined your offer?"

"Declined!" echoed Leonard, with an almost hysterical laugh. "He said he would grow gray in jail before he would marry such a woman as you, and he heaped on me every insulting epithet of which he could think."

Agnes Leonard faced her father in silence, but her manner was that of a tigress about to spring on its prey. With her clinched hands she drove her nails deeply into the yielding flesh; her face, though crimson at the cheeks, was cold and hard; her eyes blazed, and her parted lips revealed her white teeth set like the jaws of a vise.

A tragedy queen might well have taken her for a model; she was beautifully terrible, grandly repulsive—what terms can better describe one so gifted by nature as she, when swayed by unbridled passion?

"And he is alive?"

The words broke sibilantly from her lips.

"Yes, but his hours are few. He shall die like a dog!"

The anger of his daughter served to dissipate a good deal of his own wrath and leave him cooler, and he sat down in a chair and stared absently at the light on the table.

If Agnes spoke again during the ten minutes which followed he did not hear her, but he finally felt a touch on his shoulder and glanced up. Agnes stood beside him, but she had regained her usual coolness.

"What shall you do now?" she asked.

"There is but one thing to do—kill him!"

"You will do nothing of the kind!" she steadily answered.

"How do you know I will not?"

"Because he is to be my husband!"

"Zounds! do you stick to that idea?"

"It was never stronger than now. Do you think I love like a puny girl of the East, who either pines when rejected and dies like a violet, or else forgets her love in a week? No! When I love it is life, the breath I draw, the blood that surges through my veins. I love only to win!"

"Well, by George! I don't know how you are going to do it," said Leonard, surprised by her for the first time in many years.

"If need be, I will have him brought to this very house and kept a prisoner for a score of years, but I will break his will."

"And bear his scorn in the mean while?"

"I will outdo him in horrors. I will make his waking hours worse than nightmares; I will win or ruin!"

Leonard drew a long breath. He had thought before that he knew his daughter;

he began to see the acquaintance was but dawning.

Suddenly she laughed harshly, and turned away.

"See to it, my father, that you do this man no harm. Mine he is, and mine he shall remain!"

With these words she left the room, and Leonard was left alone. He went to the window, and raising the lower sash, let the air come in. It entered in puffs, and at the corner wailed in an uncanny way.

"A severe storm is coming," he muttered. "I expected it a week ago, and it will be all the more venomous now because of the delay. Whew! this equinoctial business is far from being pleasant!"

At the same moment Agnes was in her chamber, pacing to and fro as a tigress sweeps the narrow limit of a cage.

"How can I subdue him? Come to my aid, spirit of inspiration, and show me the way. Ah! Temple, I will win you yet; be sure of that; and War-Wolf will remove the girl, Missouri, forever from my path."

She shivered a little; she always did when she thought of War-Wolf and her compact with him; and at times she almost wished he would fail and lose his life in the attempt. What if he should really come and demand his reward?

No wonder she shivered.

A sudden dash of rain struck the house, and it seemed almost rocked by the wind which bore the vanguard of the storm.

Isaac Leonard arose hastily to reclose the window, but, as he did so, suddenly recoiled. He had turned just in time to see a human figure—that of an Indian—creeping through the opening.

The Blackfeet who roamed near the town were all under his orders, but he could not avoid the impression that there was something to be feared from this lusty-looking fellow who came in at a window at night. He turned toward the door, but the Indian was too quick for him. He leaped lightly to the floor and spoke two words.

"Leonard, stop!"

The click of a revolver gave significance to the order and the white man did not dare disobey. He turned toward his visitor, who stood shaking the rain-drops from his garments, but at once assumed a belligerent air.

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

The answer came calmly and steadily:

"I am the Mountain Cat, and I want you, Leonard!"

"What of me?"

"When pale-faces wish to be polite, they ask their guests to sit down."

"Well, I don't know as I want to be polite, but you can sit down if you wish. There is a chair!"

So saying, Leonard took the one nearest himself. The Indian did not speak in a hostile manner, and his host was beginning to recover his self-possession.

"Now the Indian will talk," calmly added Mountain Cat. "He has come to see Leonard on business. In the prison-lodge of the white man is the red man's friend, White Arm—Temple, you call him. Mountain Cat's heart has been sad since he heard the news, for Temple is his brother, and prison walls are not pleasant. He has called to ask that Temple may go free."

"Your heart will have to grind out a good many tears before you get Temple out," sharply answered Leonard. "He is my prisoner, and I shall handle him without regard to you or your wishes. How dare you mention him?—how dare you a Blackfoot, acknowledge my enemy as your friend? Bounding Bison shall hear of this!"

"Brave men are always merciful. Will not Leonard, who is chief of the white men's town, release Temple?"

"No, I will not; and if you dare ask it again, I will put you in prison also!" shouted the white man.

Mountain Cat leaned forward over the table and fixed a gaze on his companion which almost seemed to scorch him.

"Leonard will do nothing of the kind," he answered.

"What, you red dog?"

He started to rise, but Mountain Cat again pushed his revolver forward.

"Sit still, Leonard, or you shall die!" he quietly said.

"Bounding Bison shall hear of this!" gasped Leonard, pale with fear and rage.

"Wah! Is the white chief blind? Have his eyes so lost their cunning that he cannot tell the difference between a Blackfoot and a Pawnee?"

Leonard started.

"A Pawnee!" he exclaimed.

"Ugh! a Pawnee. Leonard should know one of the tribe when he sees him, for he has been among the lodges of that people. True, it was many years ago, but there are some things not easily forgotten. Leonard must remember Prairie Rose and the White Bison?"

There was no answer. The man addressed sat staring at his visitor with wild eyes and a trembling face.

"Who—who are you?" he feebly asked.

The Pawnee threw back his head and sonorously answered:

"I am Mountain Cat, the son of Prairie Rose and the White Bison!"

Whatever meaning these words conveyed to the great man of Quartz Rock, it was a terrible one if his manner was a criterion. He looked at the Pawnee in utter dismay, not a word passing his lips, the power of motion seeming gone from his limbs.

Mountain Cat, on his part, was no longer the kind man we have seen as the companion of Temple, but a stern-faced and pitiless avenger. As Leonard did not answer, he leaned forward over the table and added:

"I am the son of White Bison, and I have come to seek vengeance on his slayer!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WAR-WOLF KEEPS HIS WORD.

ISAAC LEONARD had encountered the deepest and most startling surprise of his life, but he was not a man to remain long crushed by adversity, and with great abruptness, as though catching like a shipwrecked mariner at a plank, he rallied and worked out his course.

What you say is all Greek to me. I don't know you, nor White Bison, nor anything about your wild talk. Have you got hold of the wrong man, or what is the trouble?"

Mountain Cat did not change expression.

"No; I have made no mistake. I know you perfectly well. You are the man who came to the lodges of the red-men, the Pawnees, so many years ago, and brought ruin and death to White Bison."

"Why, you were hardly born then—"

"When?"

Leonard bit his lips with anger. His mistake, closely followed by the question, was far from being pleasant.

"You said 'many years ago,' and I wish to convey the impression that you could hardly have remembered very vividly over fourteen or fifteen."

"Never mind; the Pawnee knows his man."

"I deny it. I was never among the Pawnees!"

Again Mountain Cat leaned forward and looked his enemy full in the face.

"Leonard, the white snake who came to the lodges of my people a score of years ago had a very peculiar figure marked on his left arm, with blue ink. It represented an eagle trying to rise from the ground, but held down by a chain which was around its leg. Perhaps Leonard will deny that he has the *chained eagle* upon his arm?"

"I will; I do!"

"Perhaps he will prove it!"

"I decline to put myself on exhibition."

"It is not necessary. Mountain Cat has seen the figure on your arm, inside of a moon."

"It is a lie, you red dog—"

The insult died away on his lips. The Pawnee made a quick leap and, catching Leonard by the throat, thrust the muzzle of his revolver against his temple.

"Wolf of the pale-faces, utter another word and you are a dead man!" he exclaimed, in a deep voice.

Leonard sat like one paralyzed. He read the mettle of his companion; he read the danger; and he dared not lift a finger.

"I—I was hasty!" he muttered. "I did not mean what I said!"

Mountain Cat released him without a word and resumed his seat. His face had assumed its usual composure, but there was no danger that Leonard would test him again. One trial had been enough, and he knew the way to get along safely was to proceed with caution.

"A Pawnee never speaks with a forked tongue," said the Indian, quietly. "I entered your chamber one night and examined your arm. There had been no doubt before, but it was a case where it was well to make sure. I looked; the chained eagle was there; and I knew I had found the man I sought."

"Perhaps more than one bear the mark."

"Two bear it; Leonard and Temple."

"Hah! you know that?"

"I have spoken."

"I see now why you are so interested in Temple; I see why you are so anxious to save him."

"Mountain Cat has not denied it, but it is not of that he would speak. Once more, will you save the prisoner?"

"He is foolishly stubborn and will not be saved. My men are bitter against him, and he will not do as I wish; if he would, I could save him."

"Leonard wants him to marry his daughter!"

The scorn in his voice made Leonard wince.

"You seem wonderfully well informed."

"The Pawnee is not blind. When the sun is shining, he does not say: 'It is night!' He knows what Leonard's wishes, and why. But let the white man think twice. He has been asked to release White Arm, and now I say, again, let it be done or dread the anger of the son of White Bison!"

"Why are you in Montana?" Leonard slowly asked.

"Mountain Cat goes and comes as he sees fit. No man is his master, and no one can say when he shall come, or why go; nor does he see fit to answer what you have asked. All he has to talk about now is Temple. Will Leonard release him?"

"Does he know what—about the past?"

"No."

"Or who you are?"

"No."

"Or anything about the chained eagle?"

"No."

"Then it shall be as you say, but he must leave Quartz Rock at once. Let him go and I will molest him no more."

"Is Leonard speaking with a straight tongue?" asked the Indian, keenly scanning the white man's face.

"I am; I swear it!"

"Then it shall be as you say. Let Temple be free by to-morrow when the sun is over our heads and all will be well; but if he is not then free, beware of the son of White Bison!"

The Pawnee abruptly arose and began moving backward toward the window, keeping his gaze fixed on Leonard.

"You can go by the door," said the latter.

"Mountain Cat will go as he came."

He pushed up the window and a spiteful dash of rain invaded the room. It was nothing to him, and he retreated calmly and systematically, while his enemy dared not interfere. The window was closed and he knew the Indian was hastening away, but he only dropped into a chair and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"He here!" he muttered, hoarsely. "Good heavens! I would as soon have thought to see the evil one—and much rather. But is he really White Bison's son? Yes, I dare say it is so, for I remember there was a pappoose around the lodge. But why is he here? Ah, there is mischief afoot, or he would not have wandered all this distance. He comes of a revengeful race, and I believe he is here to kill me. Both he and Temple here! How wonderfully strange. But I may defy them yet; I will put Bounding Bison on the Pawnee's track, while as for Temple—Release him? No; by my life, no!"

The storm was beating furiously. The long-delayed outburst of the elements had come, and down among the cabins of Quartz Rock tore the wind, bearing the rain almost in sheets, while overhead hung the clouds, as black as though colored with ink.

It was a bad night to be out, and few there were who braved the storm. Now and then a toper, who could not resist temptation, was to be seen on his way to The Hearthstone; that was all.

Stay! a closer survey shows men not going toward the hotel; men who creep along regardless of the rain, but with an evident eye to secrecy. They make use of the cabins, so far as is possible, to hide them from observation; yet the hour is so late that few lights are to be seen in the village.

Looking closer we make a second discovery: the men do not possess white skins; they are copper-colored, and their dress is wild and fantastic.

They are Blackfoot Indians.

He who leads them is War-Wolf. The young chief has never forgotten his compact with Agnes Leonard. She promised that when he had removed Missouri from her path she would become his wife, and on this night War-Wolf intends to do his share of the work.

At times he has wondered if Leonard's daughter really intends to keep her promise, but he has never wavered in his resolution to make her keep it.

The abductors approach the Pumphrey house. The village is poorly adapted to resist intruders, for the people have relied for protection on the very men now about to act so different a part. They have brought along a ladder, and this is placed under Missouri's window and War-Wolf cautiously ascends. He shows a skill which even a professional burglar might envy.

For a moment he pauses and listens. All is silent. He raises the lower sash. The silence continues; he is sure the ferry-girl is sound asleep. Then, like a snake, he works through the window, scarcely making a rustle.

His theory is but too correct; Missouri sleeps, little dreaming of the danger hovering over her.

The awakening was a rude one. War-Wolf and one of his men pounced upon her; her hands were bound and a gag inserted in her mouth; and then they rolled her in the bed-clothing and started to retreat.

Would no providential event interfere in her behalf?

It seemed not, for no alarm arose and the kidnappers soon reached the ground. Then they put the ladder away and began their retreat in the same cautious way they had entered. Whether their prisoner was alive, or had been smothered by the bed-clothing, they did not stop to inquire. Straight onward they went, with a definite purpose in view.

The rain was descending in torrents. Everywhere the ground was deluged. Miniature streams sprung into existence where water

seldom ran before. Through the canyons ran foaming torrents, dashing southward and going to swell the already doubled main river.

When the red kidnappers paused it was beside this stream. The raceway, which was usually less than half filled, was nearly level with water which dashed along like a river of yeast. Before morning it bade fair to overflow its banks.

The Blackfeet made no unnecessary pause. They removed the bed-clothing from their prisoner and she dropped upon her knees and raised her bound hands on high. With the gag in her mouth she could utter no words, no prayer for mercy, but the gesture was full of eloquence.

War-Wolf muttered a few hasty words in his native tongue. Possibly he wavered a little then, but he did not allow it to interfere with the plan he had formed. His men seized the helpless prisoner, hurried to the brink, raised her aloft and, as a moan broke from her lips, cast her into the foaming water.

For one moment only was she visible; after that they might as well have looked for a bit of gold.

They turned away, and, silently, War-Wolf led his men back to the mountain cave. He had kept his part of the compact, and he did not intend much time should go to waste before he sought Agnes and notified her he was ready for her to fulfill her pledge.

He had won her through the darkest deed of his life, and he meant to have her though all the powers that ruled Quartz Rock stood in his path.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FATE OF BOUNDING BISON.

ANOTHER day dawned, but it did not bring sunshine to Quartz Rock; the storm still raged, the wind swept down wailingly from the gulches, and the rain beat against the cabins viciously. Still, the first fury of the storm had died partially away, and the rainfall was less by a half than at first.

Nowhere was the effect of the rain more plainly visible than at the river; it was a foaming, reckless stream, which ran too swiftly to be dared by any voyager. The bowl-like space of the Brown Hand Ferry was full to the brim, and the canyon below no longer sufficed to hold the water; it had overflowed and extended eighty feet beyond, on each side.

The Adams brothers had been awake to the danger, and had drawn the boats back to a point of safety. From there they watched the flood, and, as they did not know of the results of War-Wolf's visit, they were in good spirits, despite the rain.

"Tell yer what 'tis, Jeff," said his brother, "dat air bridge ob ole Leonard's ain't gwine ter stand de strain long."

"Hope you's right, Wash."

"I know I is, Jeff. You see, de transverse pressure ob de watery elements is striking perpendicularly upon de sub-stratum ob de bridge, an' dis will cause de saggin' ob de stringers in a hydralatic density upon de segment ob de bridge restin' on de escarpment ob de rocks, and de henceconse is, dat de overflow will catch de structure on de hip, an' it will yield to de supercargo ob de rotary phalanx involved in de circumspet ob de transition planks, an' go ter hyperbolean chaos!"

Jeff gazed at his brother with the deepest awe. Wash had once been a hostler in one of the first families of Virginia, and while there had picked up an education which was really marvelous. And when he turned the crank and set the polysyllables flowing, Jeff was as helpless as a butterfly exposed to a flood.

Nevertheless, he had a practical idea—which is often as good as even such a rare education as Wash's—and he rallied as soon as possible.

"I s'pect I see now what Miss Soo meant when she said dat dar bridge wasn't gwine ter stand. She knew ebery equinoctious storm kicked up jess sech a muss ez this, an' she knowed dis one was near at hand. Dat's why she said de days ob de bridge was few on y'arth, an' dat de ferry was de only line dat was bound ter hold out."

"Right you be, Jeff; I thought ob dat myself. I knew Luna an' Sol was gittin' de bulge on Satan an' Mars, ter say nuffin' ob Jupiter, so dat de rain would cause a depressure ob de sub-entaneous membrane ob de equinoctions, an' make it rain great guns."

The dusky boatmen were not the only ones who detected danger for the bridge. Shortly after daybreak Isaac Leonard came forth, well wrapped in an oil-cloth suit, and, followed by several of his men, went as near the new structure as was safe.

The water was running over it in a thin sheet, making it barely visible.

"It's got ter go!" said one of the miners.

"I hope it will still hold," answered Leonard, anxiously.

"Yas, but it won't."

"It seems a shame for our work to be thus undone."

"We was puddin'-heads not ter think o' ther future. These rains always dux this same business, an' we might 'a' knowed we was only workin' fur ther fun on't."

"Can't something be done to save it?"

"What can be done?"

It was a question Isaac could not answer. He was fairly ingenious, but all his cunning could not devise a way to protect the bridge. Besides, they could not get near it. Even if they took the boats, it would be only to go to suicide—there was no man there sufficiently skillful to handle them in the swift current.

Leonard ground his teeth in rage. Ignorant of the dark deed during the night by War-Wolf, he did not doubt but Missouri was even then watching at a distance and exulting over the state of affairs.

Had fate resolved to beat him in the game, anyhow?

It looked like it, and he expected every man who came near to taunt him with his inglorious failure. At every step, so far, he had been beaten in his struggle for the Brown Hand Ferry and the river traffic.

"But this shall put an end to half-way measures!" he said, between his set teeth. "I'll take the boats by force and drive the girl out of town; no more childish folly. Very likely the people who are lukewarm to my wishes will raise a hue and cry; but I will defy them. The Brown Hand will have a new manager!"

The resolution was made in earnest, but as he really feared extreme measures against Soo would weaken his influence in town, he still hoped the bridge might escape destruction.

He stood there heedless of the rain and watched. What would be the end? Half of Quartz Rock was out and watching.

"She's beginnin' ter waver!" shouted a gray-bearded miner. "She can't stand it ten minutes longer."

"I'll bet a dollar she lives half an hour," said another.

"Done!"

"Accursed fools!"

Leonard muttered the words between his teeth; to him the subject was too grave for betting or jesting.

Suddenly a murmur arose from the crowd. The water seemed to gather at the bridge, as though it had been dammed by some obstacle brought down on the current; then the men shouted as the whole bridge rolled over as one timber—the smaller pieces shot down the river—the larger ones floundered helplessly for a moment and, rising, followed the rest.

Of the cherished new bridge, not so much as a chip was left where it had been built.

And then, as though to mock the builders, the rain suddenly ceased and the wind lulled.

To another party of men, the cessation of the storm was very welcome.

A score of lusty fellows were riding through the mountain passes, at a point due west from Quartz Rock. Traveling was not easy then, for temporary streams ran everywhere, but they were not men to mind slight inconveniences.

In brief, Bounding Bison leading his braves home. He had been on a foray against a party of whites who had dared begin operations among the foothills twenty miles away, and now their work was done they were homeward bound, not being at all reluctant to get under cover while the long storm raged.

As the rain ceased for the time they quickened their pace and went on at a trot, paying little attention to what was to be seen by the way.

Thus it was that they did not perceive a man who lay flat behind a boulder as they passed, watching them with anxious eyes. They went their way and he arose and staggered on. Staggered, for he was in a most pitiable condition. Drenched with rain, he was also bruised and pallid, so far as one of his race could be.

For this was Mountain Cat, the Pawnee!

What had happened to him since we saw him last? It seemed as though he had fought a grizzly bear, or been trod under the terrible hoofs of the Giant Elk; and one seeing him then would have said he was near death.

Little fear that he would that day return to beard Isaac Leonard in his den.

The Blackfeet went on their way. They were approaching their mountain home, where War-Wolf and his handful of men had been left to keep the place in order and be ready to answer a call from Leonard, and none of them were sorry to near the friendly cover.

They were riding through a dry pass when those at the front suddenly recoiled and a startling cry arose.

"Lightning Bolt!"

It was enough to change the whole current of their thoughts, and they looked up in terror.

Down the pass came the Giant Elk at a terrible rate of speed, his bounds seeming, indeed, to be supernatural, while Lightning Bolt sat in the saddle with his gaze fixed full on the savages. Even at that distance they could see that he was in his wildest mood; his usually calm face was distorted with passion.

Outlaws, slayers, and noted fighters that they were, the Blackfeet had no taste for such company, and they turned and fled. Bounding Bison was by no means the last to go, but he set his teeth as he rode and his face was dark with passion.

"By all the fiends!" he muttered, "why does that demon haunt me so? Why can I not kill him? Is he protected by powers infernal, or what is the matter? Great heavens! he must be slain, or not one of my men will be left alive!"

Suddenly a fresh terror seized the fugitives; they recoiled with cries of dismay. They had run into a *cul-de-sac*, in their wild haste, and up the surrounding rocks no horse could go.

What could be done?

Unfortunately for them there was no time for elaborate plans.

The Elk Rider swept down upon them.

One of his fiery bolts was launched, and, exploding, prostrated two of the Blackfeet. The last atom of courage went from those who lived. Several sprang from their horses and began climbing the steep rocks in a frantic attempt to escape.

But others had not time to do this.

Lightning Bolt dashed into their midst, and for the first time in his history, began a hand-to-hand conflict. He had produced a common stick from his gown, which he now used as a club, and at each blow a man dropped.

But the great feature of the affray was the work of Samson. The elk, which had been so gentle when Missouri saw him, was transformed into a demon. With a succession of snorts and whistles, he sprung furiously at the Blackfeet, knocking them down both with his huge antlers and hard hoofs. Any buck elk in his wrath is a bad adversary, and when it is remembered Samson was a giant among his kind, the reader can gain some idea of the destruction he caused.

Lightning Bolt had eyes for only one man—and that was Bounding Bison. The white Blackfoot had turned at bay and his face expressed grim resolution. He tried his revolver once, but it missed fire. Perhaps the fact saved the avenger's life. A second time he raised the hammer, but he was too late; a blow from the Elk Rider's club knocked it ten yards away.

Bounding Bison was full of courage, however, and, seeing they must come to close quarters, drew his knife.

It was never used.

The knife-hand was imprisoned, while at the same moment Lightning Bolt seized Bounding Bison in a resistless grasp, just as the elk struck down another warrior.

The Blackfeet saw their chief lifted to the saddle by his old foe, but not one of them had the courage to go to his aid. They were dimly conscious, too, that the Elk Rider shouted several sentences in his ears in a terrible voice. What they were no one except Bounding Bison heard, but he did bear, and they were enough to take away what little strength remained.

He who had led scores of slaughters—who had been a valiant fighter and the scourge of the foothills, became a trembling, nerveless coward.

The identity of Lightning Bolt was at last known to him!

A short time only did the Elk Rider speak; then he flung the renegade forcibly to the ground.

"At him, Samson; at him!"

If the Giant Elk did not understand the words in detail, he did as a whole, and he dashed upon the wretch and struck him again and again with his hoofs.

The work was soon done; and then the avengers wheeled, Lightning Bolt shouted a derisive farewell, and they dashed rapidly away.

And when the Blackfeet gathered around their chief they found him dead. The Giant Elk had rid the foothills of their scourge!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BLACKFOOT DEMANDS HIS REWARD.

THERE was sorrow in the mountain home of the Blackfeet. The body of Bounding Bison lay in one corner of the cave. He had been a valiant warrior, and all his men had liked him. Collecting around him the most desperate spirits he could find, he had trained them to his peculiar ideas until they almost thought, as well as acted, like him.

When he led to slaughter, they gladly followed.

But now he lay dead in the cave, and there was gloom among the men who had so long known and admired him.

One man only felt no sorrow. War-Wolf spoke as sadly as any of the others, but in his heart he exulted, and he walked apart that no one might see the gleam in his dark eyes. He was now chief of the band, and the sudden accession to power was by no means disagreeable. Secretly, he had always hated Bounding Bison. Why should Indian warriors follow a white man? He, War-Wolf, was all Indian, and it was fit he should command the band.

Thus reasoned the new chief.

But, chiefly, he exulted because it would give him a fresh hold over Isaac Leonard and his daughter. He had never been too sanguine that she would keep her pledge and marry him, but he had sworn she should be his though he had to abduct her. If he did this he knew he could no longer be one of the band; Bounding Bison would not allow it.

But now Bounding Bison was dead; the War-Wolf was chief of the Blackfeet, and he could do as he chose and have the band to aid him.

And he swore that Agnes should be his or he would make the streets of Quartz Rock run red with blood.

Outside the cave the storm, which had resumed its former fury, beat pitilessly. The wind rushed down the gulches with a wail and a moan; the bed of the canyon, once a broad expanse of sand with a tiny stream in the center, was a foaming river and the air was as raw and chilly as though touched by an icy hand.

But War-Wolf beeded it not; the convulsion of Nature was but in keeping with his own spirits.

He was resolved to go to Quartz Rock that day, regardless of the storm. The death of Bounding Bison would be a sufficient excuse to his men, if, indeed, any was needed, and he was impatient to claim his reward. He had kept his word and sent Missouri to a terrible death; he was impatient to see Agnes and hear her say she was ready to become his.

The hours wore on. At times the storm raged furiously; anon, it almost died away; but there was no real cessation.

Two hours after noon War-Wolf prepared for his journey and left the cave. By the time he reached the town he was wet through, but he hardly knew whether it rained or the sun shone. He could be a stoic in nearly all affairs of life, according to the fashion of his people, but his passion for Agnes was a raging volcano.

When he reached Quartz Rock the streets were deserted. The bridge had been swept away some hours before, and now no one cared to go out and defy the storm.

War-Wolf stalked straight through the street, never seeming to look about him. Yet, under his blanket, his hand clutched his weapons and he was ready for whatever might occur.

Going at once to Leonard's house, he did not pause to rap but tried the door. It was unfastened and he strode in. He had been at the house before and knew the way, and with an echoing stride he went immediately to the sitting-room.

He pushed open the door and took in the minutiae of the room at one swift glance. It had but one occupant.

Agnes sat by the table, her attitude and expression both indicative of deep thought, but at sight of the Blackfoot she sprung to her feet and the color retreated from her face with a rush. Too well she read the meaning of that visit; she had heard of the mysterious disappearance of her rival; and at sight of her confederate her blood seemed to turn to ice in her veins.

He strode forward until within five feet of her and then paused. His set face grew softer and his eyes sparkled with admiration.

"Rosebud, the War-Wolf is here!" he announced.

Agnes made a great effort to regain her usual composure.

"Yes, I—I see you," she faltered.

"The heart of the chief is glad at sight of the pale-face girl."

"I—I wonder that you have come in such weather."

"Storm and sunshine are alike, when War-Wolf seeks the mistress of his heart. Her eyes can clear away the clouds and make the earth glad and warm."

"But, isn't it rash for you to come here? You know it is the rule that the Blackfeet shall not enter the village openly—"

"Circumstances change all things. Rosebud, I have come to tell you my work is done."

"Your work?"

"The white girl of the ferry will never trouble Rosebud again!"

"What have you done with her?"

"Her body is in the river; it may be miles away, now."

Agnes's eyes sparkled. There was no pity for her rival; and even when her personal fears were so strong, she found time to exult that the woman whom she believed kept her apart from Waldo Temple, would never be seen again.

"Tell me about it!" she said.

War-Wolf obeyed, and described the tragic event with which the reader is already acquainted.

"It is well," said Agnes, steadily, for nearly all her courage had returned. "I knew she was missing, and thought I recognized your hand in the work, and I am pleased to find it so. You have done well, chief!"

War-Wolf inclined his head in a stately manner.

"When I have time," the girl resumed, "we will talk of this matter further. Suppose we meet at a given point about a week hence; in seven suns, if you prefer the expression?"

"Rosebud does not seem busy; what is to hinder our talking now?" slowly asked the young chief.

"This is hardly the right place, and—my father may come in and interrupt us."

"War-Wolf wishes to see Leonard."

"For what reason?"

"It is time he knew his daughter is to marry War-Wolf."

Agnes shivered.

"I do not want him to know just yet."

"Why not?" the Blackfoot asked, with a frown.

"Don't you think we had better—better keep it secret a while?"

"No!" was the decided answer.

"But," said the girl, desperately, "it is impossible to do as you wish now. Father and Bounding Bison might object, and—"

"Listen, Rosebud! When War-Wolf seeks a squaw, he is willing all the world should know it. What is there to conceal? If a chief of the great Blackfoot nation asks for a maiden, it is an honor. Rosebud has promised to come to my lodge, and it is right Leonard should know it at once. You ask for delay. There must be no delay. Did War-Wolf delay removing your enemy? No! and he asks to be done by as he has done. In a week Rosebud must be the mistress of his lodge."

Agnes recoiled.

"No! no!" she exclaimed, in horror.

"War-Wolf says, yes! His lodge is cold and lonely, and when Rosebud is there it will brighten, and the birds will sing once more at the door. The white girl has given her promise; does she refuse to keep it?"

"Oh, no," answered Agnes, alarmed by the sudden light in his eyes. "I always keep my word, and I will be your—your wife; but I do not wish to act hastily."

"You did not delay when promising!" was the significant reply.

The girl was driven to desperation, and it seemed like an intervention of Providence when the door opened and her father appeared at the threshold.

He stopped short at sight of War-Wolf and looked very much surprised, but he quickly recognized him as the second in command—as he supposed—of the Blackfeet, and drew his own conclusions.

He quickly advanced.

"I am glad to see you, War-Wolf. Have you a message from Bounding Bison?"

The chief gravely shook his head.

"Bounding Bison will never send another message, and yet I have news of him. The great warrior-chief has gone to the happy hunting-grounds!"

Leonard started back.

"What! Bounding Bison is not dead?" he cried.

"Yes."

"How did it happen?"

"How have half the men of the band died? By the hand of Lightning Bolt!"

"Always Lightning Bolt!" Leonard exclaimed. "Who, and what, is that creature, that he thus wars on my men—on the band?"

Others have met him and received no harm; what does it mean?"

It was a question War-Wolf did not feel competent to answer, and he made no attempt. Leonard was more deeply touched than the others knew. It was not that he had any deep affection for the dead man, for he was too selfish to grieve for any one; but they had been allies for many years, and now the chief villain's most valuable adherent was gone.

Still, he had learned to face whatever came along, and he finally raised his gaze to War-Wolf's face. During the pause, Agnes had tried in vain to attract the Blackfoot's attention and make a sign imploring secrecy; the cunning chief suspected something of the kind and would not look at her.

Leonard knew him to be as brave and unscrupulous as he could desire; was he in other ways fitted to become the leader of the Blackfoot band?

"You are now head-chief, in Bounding Bison's place," he finally said, slowly.

"Ugh!" answered War-Wolf.

"If I make the office a permanent one for you, do you think you can fill it to my interest and satisfaction?"

"Leonard may be sure of that. War-Wolf will be as faithful as is the panther to its young."

"Then the place is yours; and I hope we shall agree as well as I did with Bounding Bison."

"War-Wolf thinks we will agree better, Leonard."

"Indeed! Why so?"

"Because Leonard's daughter is going to War-Wolf's lodge as his squaw, and she will be the bond between us!"

Leonard started, and looked at Agnes. She was pale and troubled, and she made a quick gesture imploring her father to be silent. If she could get War-Wolf away and explain the matter, she could make it look less unnatural. But the great man of Quartz Rock refused to follow her lead, and turned to the Blackfoot with a scowl on his face.

"What do you mean?" he sharply asked.

"War-Wolf does not speak in riddles. He said Rosebud was to be his squaw, and he means what he said. He has bought her, paying her own price, and now she is his. She goes to the lodges of his people; she comes to War-Wolf as his squaw!"

Before he was half-through Leonard saw the

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER PLOT ANEW.

LEONARD would have looked upon the matter as a farce, had not Agnes's manner plainly shown that she was dismayed and frightened. He strode to her side with a ringing step.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

The unscrupulous girl had sown the wind; she now saw the probability that she would reap the whirlwind. In bargaining with the Blackfoot for Missouri's death she had disobeyed her father's distinctly-expressed command, and she knew his wrath would be terrible; while, on the other hand, one look at the Indian was enough to chill her blood. But her decision was quickly made; she feared death from War-Wolf's hands—it could not be so bad where Leonard was concerned.

Her best way was to make a frank confession and trust to him to get her out of it.

"Father," she said, trying to be calm, "let me tell you what has happened. You know I have hated Missouri, the ferry-girl, and wished her out of my path. I went to War-Wolf and asked him to remove her. He agreed, but his price was—my hand! I consented, and now he has done his work. Missouri is dead, and War-Wolf has come for his answer."

"For my squaw!" grimly amended the Indian.

Isaac Leonard remained as calm outwardly as an iceberg, but Agnes knew a tempest was raging within. He asked for further explanation, and she told how she had gone to the mountain cave, hoping to see Bounding Bison, and had seen War-Wolf instead. While she explained, her red lover stood like a statue, his blanket still wrapped about him, but his burning gaze never left her face.

"You did all this after I had distinctly said no personal harm was to come to the girl?"

"I did, father, but you do not know—"

Leonard turned to the Blackfoot.

"Chief," he said, "this is an unfortunate affair; one which makes it very painful for me, as well as you; but I think when you have meditated further you will be willing to release this rash girl from her promise. The eagle mates with the eagle; the bison with the bison. Agnes has been reared in the ways of pale-faces; you, in the ways of the red-men. You and she would not live happily together. Now, abandon your claim on the girl and I will give you ten horses which shall be as fleet as the wind."

He had used all his persuasive powers, but War-Wolf remained as calm as graven rock.

"The Blackfoot does not ask for horses; he asks for nothing. The Rosebud has promised to become his squaw; he would have her keep her word!"

"But, really, chief, it cannot be—"

"It can be, and it shall!"

War-Wolf threw back his head and spoke imperiously.

"Reflect, chief—"

"I am not here to reflect; I am here for my squaw!" said the Indian, in a voice which nearly deprived Agnes of what strength remained to her. "I have removed her enemy from her path, and no power on earth can rob me of my rights. Agnes goes to the lodge of the War-Wolf!"

"By all the gods! she shall not go!" cried Leonard.

"She shall go or die!" said War-Wolf, in a terrible voice.

A moment more and the lamp light gleamed on the polished barrel of a revolver as Leonard drew and covered the chief.

"Attempt to take her, you red dog, and I will shoot you dead where you stand!" he shouted.

The Blackfoot did not stir a finger.

"The warriors know where I went," he coldly said, "and I ordered them, if I did not return by another morning, to give the white man's town to the flames."

It was a fiction, but an excusable one. Still, it failed.

"Let them come; I defy them!" hotly answered Leonard. "You aspire too high, and I will show you I am still master here. You cannot have the girl, and if your red hands are anxious for a fight, we can accommodate them. Lightning Bolt has reduced their numbers until they are fewer than my own men. From this day I cast them off, and you are at liberty to do whatever you see fit."

"Listen to me!" said the chief, still cold and unmoved. "If you deny me the price of the work I have done, I swear to devote the rest of my life to revenge. The Blackfeet shall become the scourge of the foothills as they have never been before, but they shall war on Leonard's friends, not on his enemies. No white man shall dare step outside the village; the red-men will always be lurking in the mountain gulches and watching. Here in your village you shall starve for the food you dare not go forth to obtain, and some night you shall awake to find the roof of your house burning over your head, and butchered men and women scattered from the river to the canyon. I swear this by the graves of my people!"

Before he was half-through Leonard saw the

need of averting the threatened danger, and rapidly his fertile mind mapped out a course of procedure.

He first sent Agnes away and then, inviting his unwelcome visitor to sit down, opened a long conversation. On his part it was a skillful one; all his wiles were brought into play.

He first tried to reason with War-Wolf, and then, when the latter remained firm, seemed to yield gradually and let the chief argue in turn.

Gradually, he yielded, but he made it a condition of the marriage that War-Wolf should abandon his wild life and settle down somewhere as a farmer or stock-raiser. This part of the compact was the more easily ratified because War-Wolf did not intend to keep it, nor did Leonard intend he should live to do so.

Upon such an empty bargain we need not dwell; enough to say that, in the end, peace seemed established and they parted with a cordial shake of the hand. It had been agreed that Agnes should have three days in which to prepare for the marriage, but War-Wolf was to call the next evening—as a lover!

He went away with an appearance of satisfaction, heedless of the pouring rain and the mutterings of the thunder. For the electric batteries had taken part in the war of the elements, and, as a silent accompaniment to the thunder, the lurid lightning played along the sky, touching the ebon clouds with varied shades of red.

Agnes came to her father with a sad face.

"Were you in earnest in promising my hand to that red monster?" she asked.

"Girl," Leonard answered, in a voice she never forgot, "if I gave you over to ten thousand years of such a life, it would ill express my condemnation of your course. I told you that, on no condition, was bodily harm to be done the ferry-girl. You at once planned for her death, and, not only that, but you ran your head into the worst fix of your life. You have jeopardized the lives of all the people of Quartz Rock, for the Blackfeet can butcher all, if they choose. Words cannot express my utter condemnation, so we will pass to the means of relief. War-Wolf must die!"

Again Agnes breathed free. Nothing would please her more.

"I have two plans," resumed Leonard. "In the Blackfoot band, there is an ambitious brave named Walking Eagle. He has always been jealous of War-Wolf, who is his junior, and I shall tell him plainly that, if he kills War-Wolf, he shall be chief in his place. Again, the visit of the latter to us, to-morrow night, is but a trap. I shall give him wine, and if he drinks he will never go away. It will be poisoned!"

The beautiful demon was delighted; evidently, she had made no mistake in giving her father charge of affairs. She breathed again; the Blackfoot would be removed from her path, as completely as Soo had been, and she would yet win Temple.

She felt so relieved that when she went to her room she scarcely thought of War-Wolf. One of Leonard's remarks had given her a new thought, and she was engaged in elaborating it.

She knew something about the poison of which her father had spoken. A dose of a certain size would kill in ten minutes and the victim would fall without warning, as though from heart-disease. Reduced one-half in quantity, it would not take effect until at the expiration of about five hours.

Furthermore, there was a positive antidote. The strongest dose would be rendered harmless by means of the counter-agent.

Knowing all this, and forgetful of the evil effects of her own headstrong course in the past, she determined to make use of it as a means of winning Temple. She would visit him in his cell, and if he showed no signs of yielding, give him the poison. Then she would tell him what he had swallowed, and give him a choice between death and the antidote—the latter to be given only on condition that he consented to marry her.

This scheme seemed so clever to her that she relapsed into a very amiable mood and, in that condition, fell asleep.

How long it was before she awoke she never knew, but her eyes suddenly opened widely and she sat erect in bed. She had a vague, but keen, idea that something was wrong, but what it was she did not know.

It was as though she had awakened from a nightmare, but her impression was that the trouble was a substantial one.

She listened intently. All seemed still except the beating of the storm outside. Inside her room there was no audible sound. Still, she was not easy and, once, nearly decided to arise and strike a match. Thinking better of it, she finally lay down, however, but had barely done this when something cold was pressed against her temple and a voice hissed:

"Not a word, or you are a dead woman!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDERS.

AGNES was wise enough to value her personal safety above all other things, and she attempted to make no outcry, but such an attempt would in any case have been useless, from the

fact that a hand had also closed over her mouth.

Plainly, the intruders were thoroughly in earnest.

"Now, my lady," continued the unknown, "I want to have a little talk with you, and I give you fair warning not to do anything foolish. All we want is to ask a few questions; if these are truthfully answered, we will go quietly away. I swear that no bodily harm is intended you. This is the case, allowing that you will not sound an alarm. If you do I will send a bullet through your head. Release her, pard!"

The hand was removed from Agnes's mouth, but she still felt the touch of the revolver.

"I will tell you anything you wish," she hurriedly said.

"Very well; what we wish is to know what has become of Missouri, the ferry-girl?"

Agnes started.

"I do not know," she answered.

"Do not begin the conversation with a lie. I say you do know. The question is, will you tell us?"

"I would if I knew, but, really—"

"Really, I see you want me to press the trigger of this revolver!" retorted the intruder.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Deserve mercy, and you shall have it. Now, no more nonsense. You were concerned in the disappearance of Missouri, and I am going to know where she is or make matters hot around here!"

The man's voice told of inflexible purpose. Agnes thought there was something familiar about it, but to save her life she could not place it—probably the man took good care that she did not.

"Who are you, that is so much interested in Missouri?" she demanded.

"I may be the Flying Dutchman; that's an affair that don't concern you. I am here to ask questions, not to answer them. Come, now my lady, no more back talk. You know what has become of the ferry-girl, and we are going to make you talk. Where is she?"

The revolver was pressed harder against her temple, but she was resolved not to confess her share in the crime and, suddenly, she made a bound with the hope of escaping them.

Vain attempt! The second man had plainly been watching for just this movement, and he caught her before she had hardly left her pillow and flung her back.

"Strangle her!" cried he with the revolver, with an oath.

Strong fingers closed over her delicate neck, but she managed to gasp, faintly.

"Mercy! mercy!"

The suffocating hold relaxed.

"Will you answer?"

"Yes, yes!" said Agnes, ready enough to talk, now that she saw her life seemed really to depend upon it.

"Well, where is Missouri?"

"Dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yea."

"Woman, have you dared to do her harm?" sibilantly demanded the unknown.

"No, no; not I! She was killed by the Blackfeet."

"By your order, I'll swear."

"No; upon my word of honor, no. I had nothing to do with it."

"How was the work done?"

"She was thrown into the river raceway."

The stranger uttered an exclamation of horror. The fate it suggested was one which seemed terrible when taken in connection with a girl so fair and good as Soo. Under some circumstances he might have doubted, but as it was he believed implicitly. He bent over her and spoke in a husky voice.

"Woman, your hand is visible in this matter. You hired the Blackfeet to do the deed, and it was one worthy of your black heart, but you shall never profit by it; the deed shall recoil upon yourself, and you shall live to see your own cherished plans go to ruin. It would not trouble my conscience if I sped your life to-night, but, unlike you, I am not a slayer of women. You shall live, but it will be to disappointment. Remember what I have said!"

"Who are you?" Agnes asked, rebelliously.

"Your enemy, woman."

"Are you afraid to tell your name?"

"If you call it so, yes. I took the pains to put on a mask when I came here, because I wished to preserve my identity, and I think between that and the darkness I shall succeed. I do not see fit to reveal too much."

Agnes began a sarcastic reply, but when she waited for an answer at the end, none came. She spoke again; all was silent. Impressed by an idea, she arose and struck a light. She was alone in the chamber. Aided by the howling of the storm, the unknown men had beat a silent retreat while she talked.

She looked out of the window through which they had evidently gone, as the lower sash was still raised, but, though the lightning was playing brightly, she could see nothing of them. Her first inclination was to arouse her father and tell him what had happened, but she feared

he would upbraid her with having all Montana at her heels as avengers, and so closed the window and again retired.

This time she did not fall asleep so quickly. The possibility that the unknown men might repent their clemency, and return to do the work they might have done at first, was enough to keep her awake.

Perhaps an hour had passed when she heard a cry outside. It was repeated, this time more distinctly, and she recognized the uttered word.

It was that of "Fire!"

She arose and hurried to the window. The electric light now had a rival which, so far as it went, was the more potent of the two; one of the village buildings was wrapped in flames and burning furiously.

"Struck by lightning!" carelessly thought Agnes. "They might as well let it burn; nothing can save it now."

Yet, the men of the village were arousing and hurrying to the scene, and as two of them passed she heard one remark:

"It's the new jail, and, unless some miracle has stepped in to help him, Temple must be burned to a crisp!"

Agnes sprung to her feet with a gasp. Waldo Temple in danger—shut up in the burning building to die like a rat! Her heart almost seemed to stop its beating at the thought. Somehow, she scarcely realized the way, she managed to get inside her garments and out of the house. It was not until she found the rain beating in her face that she became cool enough to know what she was doing. But she might as well have remained in the house; as she reached the group of helpless men, the roof fell headlong into the fiery pit and a shower of sparks shot upward.

"That's the last o' Temple! By thunder, I'm really sorry fur the youngster."

Agnes wheeled. It was the jailer who had spoken.

"Is he really lost?" Isaac Leonard harshly asked.

"He is, fur sure. Thar wa'n't a soul at the jail when the lightnin' struck; I was the first ter arrive; an' when I did come it was too late ter go in. Yas, pore feller, he's a goner, sure!"

Was his assertion true? Let us follow the two masked men who had so lately invaded Agnes's chamber. After retreating by the window, they took their ladder away and were soon at a place where they could safely talk.

"What now, Jack, me b'ye?" asked one of them.

"Revenge!" said the other, sternly. "I'll pay this female devil back in her own coin."

"Who'll you kill?"

"Nobody. If that was my game I would take Temple, of course, but I am on a different scent. It will be more bitter to her to know he lives and that she can't have him, than to give him to her dead. I have hated him, but now that Missouri is dead, I'll do him a good turn and then get out of Quartz Rock."

"But the gal may not be did, sor."

"No hope that she's alive. I said as much when I knew that she had disappeared, and this female fiend would not have confessed a knowledge of her death if it had not been true. She tried to throw all the blame on the Blackfeet, but I know her well. Come, we will release Temple!"

So saying, the two men, whom we easily recognize as Jack Purcell and Mike Mulloy, moved toward the jail. On the way Jack found a crowbar, and with this they easily forced the outer door. After that, matters were not difficult. Making use of the jailer's light, they penetrated to Temple's room.

He had been sleeping on the bare floor, but their entrance aroused him. He sprang up and, seeing two masked men, grasped one of the chairs and stood ready to defend himself.

"You needn't be alarmed," said Purcell; "we are not here as foes—nor friends, either, unless you see fit to take it that way. For revenge on your enemies, whom I hate, I open your door and say: 'Go, if you see fit!'"

"I believe I recognize you," said Temple, warily.

"Jack Purcell!" that person acknowledged, taking off his mask. "I am he. I don't expect you to trust me, and don't care a picayune whether you do or not, but my hatred for you has vanished with the death of her who caused it—Missouri."

Temple started violently.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"I see you do not know the truth, yet. Missouri is dead. The devilish hatred of Agnes Leonard is at last satisfied."

Mr. Jack Purcell was one of the last men in the world one could expect to turn preacher, and he surely had little right to criticize Agnes, but Missouri's fate had indeed made an impression on his seemingly callous heart.

Temple strode forward and caught his arm.

"Are you telling the truth?" he asked, in a terrible voice.

"I am."

"And Agnes has murdered Missouri?"

"I won't say that, exactly, but— Well you shall hear the story."

He then told all he knew, and there was such

an air of sincerity about his manner that Temple could no longer doubt.

The tidings fell on him with stunning force. Missouri dead! The extreme of misery was expressed by those two words; the future seemed to stretch before him bleak and barren.

Missouri dead!

Suddenly, he extended his hand to Purcell.

"Give me a weapon!" he said, hoarsely. "Give me a revolver, a knife—I care not what—and I will seek revenge!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE POISONED WINE.

PURCELL unhesitatingly handed over one of his revolvers, and grasping it, Temple strode to the door; but at the threshold he paused.

"No!" he said, suddenly; "the time has not yet come. I must first see the Mountain Cat."

He had been feeling somewhat bitter because there had been no sign from the Pawnee, but in this emergency his mind turned to him. Before he sought the Leonards, he would see Mountain Cat, and try to make sure Missouri was past help.

Purcell heard his decision—the motive was not explained—in indifference, but he suggested that they leave the jail while they could. Some one might drop around and interfere with their going.

Mike Mulloy loitered behind; but the other two men, who had been such deadly enemies, walked side by side through the village. Not a word passed between them; both were thinking of Missouri.

Near the entrance to Shoestring Gulch, they paused.

"We part here," said Purcell, "for I leave Quartz Rock, at once. I am going South, to Arizona, it may be; and there is a possibility I may turn over a new leaf. I won't say for certain. So, here we part, without sentimentality, without the hypocrisy of a hand-shake. I tried to kill you once, and this last favor was done by me only to spite Agnes. Were Soo to come to life now, I would try my level best to throw you cold, as we used to say in old times. Hatred dies hard. Ah! here comes Mike—he goes South with me. What have you been doing?"

"L'avin' me keard fur dem spalpeens," said Mulloy, with a chuckle. "I wint about dhe jail wid a firebrand, a bit, an', begorra, it's meself thinks dhere will be a bonfire goin' soon."

"Then we must go ahead of it. Come on! Temple, so-long!"

"Good-day!"

It was a singular parting for ex-rivals, but queer things often happen in Montana even to this day. Purcell and Mulloy disappeared in the darkness, and then Temple turned his back on the village and hurried away. His destination was a mountain cave, where he hoped to find Mountain Cat.

As he went, the wind buffeted and the rain drenched him, but he heeded neither one. His mind was on Missouri, and he went like one in a bitter dream—a nightmare. Looking back, when half his journey was made, he saw a bright light at the village, and knew Mike Mulloy had not failed to get his bonfire.

He still pressed on, and finally arrived at the place he was seeking. At the mouth of the cave he sounded a signal, but no answer was returned. When repeated efforts had proved unavailing, he ventured inside, found Mountain Cat's material for getting a light, and soon had a torch burning.

The light, however, fell on barren rocks; except for his own presence, the place was untenanted.

He was deeply disappointed, for he had hoped soon to confide his troubles to the Pawnee and secure the benefit of his sagacity. On the whole, his absence from his haunt seemed somewhat odd. Temple went to the ashes in one corner and raked them open. They were cold and dark.

Somehow this fact struck a chill to his veins. The condition of the ashes led him to suspect Mountain Cat had not been there since they parted, nearly two days before, at Brown Hand Ferry.

Where, then, was he? Had he, too, been made the victim of foul play? An indescribable air of gloom hung about the place, and seemed to answer affirmatively. If this was so, it explained why the Pawnee had made no visible effort to get him out of prison.

For the first time Temple lost courage. He had work to do, but he needed a strong hand to help him. Where was he to get it? Gaffer Golightly was his friend, but he was not the man to make war on Isaac Leonard. In such an emergency, Mountain Cat was worth half a dozen of him.

Yet, the only hope left seemed to rest in Gaffer. He was a skillful trapper, and he might be able to find some trace of Soo.

"I will return to the village at once. The night is not yet so far gone that I need fear meeting the village people, unless they remain up on account of the fire. I will go at once!"

With another glance around the gloomy cave, he left the place and began his return.

War-Wolf did not forget his appointment with the Leonards, and he was early at the house on the following evening. During the day the fury of the storm had subsided to a dull, intermittent drizzle, but all weather was alike to the Blackfoot, and he heeded it very little.

He was received with a politeness which his wily entertainers took care not to make too cordial. They had an ax to grind, and did not intend to let their intended victim take the alarm.

In a glass, set apart for his use, a quantity of poison had been placed. When the wine on which they meant to "treat" him had been placed therein, he would swallow a potion which would do quick, deadly work.

Agnes was not looking well. She had taken a fierce, strong fancy for Temple, and now that she believed he had perished in the burning jail, the reaction had come and she felt a painful languor new to her.

It was only with an effort that she succeeded in acting her part in the evening's drama; but she was anxious to see War-Wolf disposed of, and another chance might not come.

Leonard cunningly devoted the greater part of the evening to business. Now that there must be a change in the leadership of the Blackfeet, it was natural he should wish to go over every point carefully.

He had seen Walking Eagle in the forenoon, and that brave had grasped eagerly at the chance offered him. As has been said, he had always been jealous of War-Wolf, and nothing would give him more pleasure than to remove his rival.

The leadership of the band was to be his reward if he put War-Wolf out of the way, and he intended to do it.

If War-Wolf's suspicions had not been lulled to rest, he, too, was playing a part. He was grave and dignified all the time, though now and then he gave Agnes some metaphorical compliment, as though to show her he had not forgotten their engagement, and the Leonards considered the evening a success.

When he spoke of going, Isaac proceeded steadily to the more important business.

"Let me give you some wine, before you go. It may not be quite so strong as what you are in the habit of having, but it is all I have in the house, and is the very best sherry. Agnes, will you pour three glasses?"

The girl arose and went to the side-table. The glasses were arranged so that there could be no mistake, and she poured out the wine with a steady hand.

Leonard did not let conversation flag, but held War-Wolf's attention, and the chief did not once glance toward Agnes.

She advanced with the three glasses and handed one each to War-Wolf and Leonard.

"Now, then," said the latter, with a flourish of his hand, "let us drink this toast. Success to Quartz Rock and the Blackfoot band; death to Lightning Bolt and all other enemies!"

He raised the glass, but War-Wolf did not follow his lead.

"The Blackfoot will not drink now; he will save the fire-water until he has reached the cave!" he steadily said.

And then he drew an empty flask from his pocket and made a motion to pour the contents of the glass into it.

"But you need something to warm you for the journey," urged Leonard, not at all pleased.

"It will warm just as much if taken at the cave," was the unmoved reply.

"I can improve on that; drink what you have, now, and I will fill your flask in addition," said the plotter.

War-Wolf did not answer until he had poured the poisoned wine into the flask.

"I will take this as I have said, and as much more as Leonard will give me," he then said, stoically.

His host dared not insist. To urge him was to run too great a risk of exciting suspicion, and he let the matter pass; but he forced conversation as an excuse for seeming to forget to give more, and the Blackfoot went away with the poisoned drink in the flask. Their parting was friendly, and then the chief strode away in the storm and darkness.

Leonard returned to his daughter and heaped a profusion of curses on the Indian's head.

"But if he drinks it at the cave, it will be just as well," said Agnes.

"If he does! Ay, there's the rub. I cannot help thinking that the red demon is suspicious. His race don't usually decline liquor when they can get it, and his singular course leaves me in doubt and fear."

"Well, if he escapes the wine, we have Walking Eagle upon whom to depend."

"Ay, and I place my reliance on that brave, now. He is wild to be chief of the Blackfeet, and if War-Wolf escapes his hand he will do well. Let us wait and see!"

The Blackfoot chief strode homeward through the rain and darkness with the regularity of a

machine. When he arrived at the cave he went at once to his private room, leaving word for Walking Eagle to follow.

The latter soon came; a cruel, crafty-looking man of middle age, and he stood proudly in the presence of the chief he hoped to slay and succeed.

"Leonard has sent you this, Walking Eagle," said War-Wolf, calmly, as he produced his flask. "He bids you drink to his health and be strong of heart!"

Walking Eagle saw nothing suspicious in this; on the contrary, he felt as much amusement as was natural to his phlegmatic nature at the thought that his ally, Leonard, had thus made use of the man they both hated.

When he lowered the flask from his mouth it was empty.

War-Wolf then engaged him in conversation, and, while seeming at his ease, watched him keenly.

Perhaps ten minutes had passed when Walking Eagle suddenly laid his hand upon his heart, his face expressed dismay, he made a motion to rise, but failing, fell to the floor—dead!

The chief bent over him to make sure of the fact, and then spurned the body with his foot.

"Die, traitorous dog!" he exclaimed, in a sonorous voice, "and may this be the fate of all who plot against War-Wolf. Your compact with Leonard has cost you your life; you will never lead the Blackfeet of the foothills!"

He then stretched one hand out toward Quartz Rock.

"Leonard," he added, his face convulsed with terrible wrath, "you have sealed your own fate. You have not poisoned War-Wolf; he lives for revenge! Hear me, great Manitou, when I swear that for this perfidy the streets of the white man's town shall run red with blood! I will give their lodges to the flames, the people to the knife. Leonard, you shall kneel to the Blackfoot, and howl for mercy like a dog!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE AVENGERS APPEAR!

GAFFER GOLIGHTLY was greatly shocked by the supposed fate of Temple. He had been devoted to the interests of the young man he had undertaken to guide through Montana; his bravery and kindness of heart had appealed to the veteran's personal liking; and he had done what he could for him after he was put in jail.

Principally, this consisted of a visit to Leonard; an unavailing one; for he dared not war against the ruling powers.

The morning after the events last described, Gaffer entered The Hearthstone and sought the sympathizing presence of his friend, Beriah Brown. The latter proposed that they should "liquor," and they did so.

"I've been over ter see them darkies," said Gaffer; "them Adamases, ye know. They are in ther wu'st kind o' troubles, an' their lamingtons is affectin'. They hev gi'n up all hope that their mistress will ever come back; they think she has been overtook an' drowned by ther overflow, or made way with by unnefarious means, ez Wash calls it. Et makes me feel gloomy, taken with ther ontimely demise o' pore Temple."

"That's ther way ther goose jumps in Quartz Rock," said the miner, "an' I'm gwine ter git up an' dust. I can't stand it. Ther place ez too tough fur Beriah Brown—Brown without an 'e.'"

"I mean ter stay till ther ruins o' ther jail cool off so that my pard's remains can be resurrectionized, fur mebbe they won't git decent burial ef I don't. Pore young feller! it was a bad day when he come ter this beathen town, but I warned him; I gi'n him fa'r warnin', 'Riah.'"

"I've heard ye, Gaff."

"Et makes me feel bad; durned ef it don't! I'm an old-stock hunter an' used ter tragedies, but this one unhorses my rudder, ez ther sailors say. 'Riah, I must bev another drink. What's yours?'"

They were not the only ones who mourned the supposed death of Temple. Agnes, with all her faults, had loved him with all her fierce, unrestrained nature, and she roamed restlessly about the house.

Remembering the beginning of the drama at Quartz Rock, it was like looking into a tomb to think of those who had taken part. Where was Missouri? Dead! Where was Temple? Dead! Where were Jack Purcell and Mike Mulloy? Missing! Where was War-Wolf?

There she reached a question she could not answer, but she hoped for the best—the best from her point of view—and impatiently awaited news from Walking Eagle.

But the day brought no news.

Another night fell over Quartz Rock.

Leonard and his daughter were alone in their sitting-room. The former had tried to read, but he could not fix his mind upon the printed columns.

While sitting in this way he heard the door of the room open, but, supposing it to be done by a servant, he did not turn his head until a sharp cry from Agnes startled him.

Then he wheeled, fearing to see War-Wolf,

but saw, instead—Mountain Cat and Waldo Temple.

The latter led the way and had paused after entering, but Agnes sprung forward, her hands extended, her beautiful face filled with the light of joy.

"Oh! Waldo, Waldo!" she cried. "Thank Heaven you are alive!"

The face of the young man grew hard and stern, and he waved her back.

"It is Heaven I do thank, not you!" he coldly answered. "Keep your seat, Miss Leonard, and you, sir; for I have no desire to be received as a friend. It is not in that role I have come, but as an enemy. I have come to settle the account between us!"

"My dear sir," interrupted Leonard, "I do not understand your words. You must be under some misapprehension. I may have spoken hastily, but I am still your best friend."

"Heaven save me from having another like you! But, sir, I have not come here to bandy useless words, and with your permission we will at once proceed to business. Strategic talk can come afterward, if you then think it will do any good. Mountain Cat, you may speak first!"

The young Indian moved forward a few paces and stood facing his enemy. He looked ill and less strong than before, and there were bruises on his face which told of a rough experience, but he was in far better bodily condition than when we last saw him, the day of Bounding Bison's death, dragging his maimed body through the mountain pass.

But Leonard flushed angrily.

"I will not hear this sneaking red-skin!" he exclaimed. "I have seen him before, and I know him to be a prince of liars. I will hear nothing from him!"

"I beg your pardon, but you will hear!" Temple firmly answered. "We are masters of the house for the time, and to convince you that we mean to be heard, let me say I will use this weapon if necessary!"

He showed a revolver and Leonard dropped back in his chair.

"Talk on!" he said, sullenly.

"Waldo, Waldo!" interrupted Agnes, "what is the meaning of this? Oh! for the love of Heaven, do not look at me so sternly!"

"Woman," he answered, icily, "your best resort is to silence. Be still, for it may save you from trouble. Indian, speak!"

"I am a brave of the Pawnees," began the younger man in a deep voice, "and my name is Prairie Cat, though in Montana I am known as the Mountain Cat. My face is that of one whose blood is all Indian, but I am really a half-breed. My mother was a girl of the Pawnee nation, named Prairie Rose, and my father was a white man who had joined our people. He was called White Bison."

"You have told me this once before," sneered Leonard.

"The white man and his red squaw were happy," the Pawnee calmly continued, "and one child was born to them—he who afterward became the Prairie Cat. But a dark shadow gathered over them. When White Bison left the land of the pale-faces, he fled because an enemy of his had made men believe he was guilty of crime. White Bison resolved to forsake the race which had become so bitter toward him, and to live and die an Indian."

"But his enemy followed him. He feared White Bison would some day return and prove the truth of the past, so he again sought him, resolved that the Bison should die. With him came an ally whose real name was Abbott, though he had many others. First, the enemy tried to turn the Pawnees against White Bison, but he failed. Then he went to the pale-face soldiers who live in the big forts and told them White Bison was plotting to have the Indians go on the war-path. The chief in blue believed, and soldiers were sent to seize the white Pawnee."

"They came upon the village by surprise and found White Bison, but he would not surrender. He managed to get his squaw and child, and flee, but the soldiers pursued. He tried to cross the river, but a second boat pursued and overtook the fugitives. Their own craft was overturned and White Bison was never seen again. Search was made for his body, but, failing, they knew he was drowned. It was enough; his enemy was willing the squaw and pappoose should live; so the soldiers went back to the fort and he went with them."

"Here he made a mistake; he should have killed the child of White Bison. The pappoose grew to manhood, and while his mother lived she never tired of telling him of the murderer of his father. The boy swore to be avenged. He knew the name of the assassin, but he had disappeared from his old home and no one knew where he was. There was but one clue to him, besides his name, which he might have changed. Upon his left arm was worked in blue ink a curious figure representing a chained eagle."

"One day news came to the Prairie Cat. A Pawnee who had once deserted his tribe returned and told a strange story. In the far land of Montana, he had been a member of a band of men who were offshoots and renegades of the Blackfoot nation. They were led by a man named Bounding Bison, but were really

under the command of a white man named Isaac Leonard.

"Prairie Cat heard with interest, for this had been the name of his father's enemy and assassin. But were they one? He journeyed to Montana, saw the Blackfeet, Bounding Bison and Leonard. One night he secretly entered the latter's chamber and looked at his left arm. There he saw the figure of the chained eagle!"

"Why need I talk further? Leonard, I am Prairie Cat, the son of White Bison, and I have come for vengeance!"

With ringing voice, folded arms, and proudly-erected head the Pawnee faced his foe. His look was pitiless, but lofty. Leonard was not given time to speak, for Waldo Temple pressed to the front.

"Isaac Leonard," he said, sternly, "I, too, have an account to square with you. I am the son of Waldron Temple, once of Illinois. At the time I was born, you were his partner in business. He thought you his friend, but you were his bitter enemy, or, rather, to enrich yourself, you deliberately planned to ruin him and absorb his share of the business. You put forged papers afloat, all of which seemed to have been his work. Your plot worked well, and Waldron Temple saw ruin and a long term in prison menacing him. He yielded to the horror of the moment and fled."

"He left but one near relative—myself. I was then a child of only two years—too young, of course, to long remember him—and when I was taken by my deceased mother's relatives, I was reared under the belief that both my parents were dead. Whether those who cared for believed my father guilty I do not know, for not a whisper of the tragic past ever reached me until I came to Montana, a few short days since. But, now, I know the truth."

"My father, Waldron Temple, and White Bison, the adopted Pawnee, were one and the same person; it was from Chicago he fled when he went to the land of the Pawnees to escape your devilish arts, but, as Mountain Cat has shown, he fled in vain. Fearful that he might return and place the blame where it belonged, you followed and finished your work. He had taken a maiden of the Pawnees for his wife, but you broke up that home as you had broken his first one."

"Now, we, Mountain Cat and myself, his sons, and half-brothers, are here to seek vengeance!"

His voice rung out ominously, but Leonard managed to remain cool. He was alarmed, but, being in the heart of his village, he trusted he might yet escape.

"Allow me to ask how you established the relationship?" he sneered.

"White Bison told all his story to his red squaw, by whom it was given to Prairie Cat as he grew up. Among the rest, White Bison said, when speaking of the chained eagle on Leonard's arm, that his son had precisely the same mark, placed there once by Leonard. This mark is on my arm, and as the ink has once been renewed, it is perfectly distinct. By my name, and by the chained eagle Prairie Cat knew me long ago, though he has but lately revealed the fact. By birth, and by our desire for vengeance, we are brothers!"

CHAPTER XL

WAR-WOLF'S REVENGE.

ISAAC LEONARD could no longer close his eyes to the fact that he was in great danger. He read inexorable determination in the faces of both young men, and as they had but to raise their revolvers and pull the triggers to end the feud, he knew his life hung as by a thread.

But Agnes, though dismayed at the turn conversation had taken, could not so easily give up her plans.

She moved quickly forward and dropped on her knees at Waldo Temple's feet.

"Oh! pardon, pardon!" she implored. "Do not make me suffer for the crimes of the past; do not break my heart! Waldo, I love you as woman never loved before. Forget this enmity and smile upon me, and I will be your slave—your slave!"

"Arise!" he said, sternly. "I have no pity for you; I know you too well!"

"I have done no harm!" she went on, brokenly, feverishly, all her vigor poured forth in speech. "Oh! Waldo, will you kill me? I have loved you so; and I must continue to love you while I have breath. If I have spoken hastily to you, it was because I feared to lose you, but that can be forgiven if you see it as it was. Forgive me, if I have done wrong, for I did not mean it! Waldo, Waldo!"

"You are wasting words," he said, unmoved. "You argue well, but I happen to know how false you are. Have you done no harm? Woman, where is Missouri?"

"I do not know," she said, quickly. "Upon my honor, I do not know. Why do you ask me?"

"Who should know so well as you?—you and War-Wolf!"

A frightened look crept into the scheming woman's eyes.

"I know all!" he icily added. "You hired the Blackfoot to murder her, and he threw her into the river."

"I had nothing to do with it! Has War-

Wolf dared make a charge against me? I swear—"

"Stop!" he said, sternly.

Then he walked to the door, opened it, and three persons entered. They were Gaffer Golightly, Beriah Brown and Missouri.

Agnes recoiled.

"Alive!" she gasped.

Yes; it was Missouri, and alive. A little paler than of old, perhaps, but there was nothing spectral about her. She was looking at Agnes, not bitterly, but with a mournful gaze which the wicked woman never forgot.

"Alive!" said Temple, calmly. "You see she has come back from the grave to which you doomed her."

"I had nothing to do about it!" Agnes wildly cried. "Upon my word of honor, I swear—"

"Once more, stop! Your own lips have condemned you. When you have talked in this room keen ears have listened. You have been heard to talk of it calmly, only fearing that War-Wolf would claim his reward."

"It is false! Who says it is so?"

"Mountain Cat—"

"Always Mountain Cat!" she interrupted, venomously.

"Even so," Temple calmly said. "But for him Missouri would be dead. When the Blackfeet threw her into the river, Mountain Cat leaped in to her rescue at peril of his own life. Had the water been as low as usual, he would have been dashed to pieces on the sharp stones which line the bottom of the raceway; but it was full to the brim and he was dashed along like a feather. A swimmer's skill was of but little use there, but he did what he could, and held fast to his helpless burden. They were at last cast upon the shore, but Mountain Cat was bruised and nearly dead, while Missouri was prostrated by the shock. He managed to convey her to a safe place in the mountain, but when it was done he lacked strength to come to me. Once, he set out in a pouring rain to go to another resort he had in the hills, where he could leave word for me, but his strength failed on the way and he barely managed to get back to the starting-place. But in the cave he has recuperated, and, with Missouri, is now here."

Isaac Leonard sat looking at the avengers with dogged calmness. He was a man who was never beaten while life remained, and he meant to show his talons yet.

But Agnes was in despair. She saw the glance which passed between Temple and Missouri and knew there was a perfect understanding between them. But she was resolved they should never live to taste happiness. Under the folds of her dress she clutched a knife, which she was determined to use, if necessary.

"Temple," she said, huskily, "do you persist in condemning me?"

"Condemn!" he echoed. "The word is weak. There is none which will fitly express my utter loathing for a woman of your crimes. To make myself more clear, let me say that this girl whom you have tried to kill is my affianced wife!"

"And I am—am—"

"Not wanted!" curtly answered the young man.

It was enough; a thousand words would not have made it plainer. Agnes drew her breath with a quick, sibilant gasp, and then with a panther-like leap she sprung toward Missouri, her knife uplifted for the fatal blow.

But another form shot forward, moving quicker than she, and her wrist was grasped by the Mountain Cat.

"No!" he answered, sturdily. "The ferry-girl was not born to die by the arts of the tiger-cat. Stand back!"

He wrenched the knife away and pushed her toward a chair.

"You may ez wal throw up ther sponge," said Gaffer Golightly. "You hev been at it, Leonard & Co., ever sence you got ter hankerin' arter ther Brown Hand Ferry, but the gal still survives, an' so does ther ferry, though ther bridge is gone ter everlastin' smash. I'm an old-stock hunter, an' not in fashion, but it's my opinion ye had better fly low!"

"That's ther opinion o' me, likewise, an' I'm Beriah Brown—Brown without any 'e'" said that gentleman.

There was no answer, for at that moment the report of several revolvers broke the silence, sounding near the house. All started, but simultaneously heavy steps sounded in the hall, the door was flung open and a man entered, covered with blood.

He looked at Leonard, staggered and fell to the floor; then raised himself to his elbow with one word:

"Blackfeet!"

Then fell back, still and lifeless.

Isaac Leonard sprung to the window and tore aside the curtain. What he saw appalled him. Every cabin in the village seemed on fire. In a score of places the red flames were springing up, lapping wall and roof, and the streets were lighted in a way the occupants of the room would have noticed before had it not been for the all-absorbing scene.

Suddenly, a fresh volley of shots sounded on the air, and then Leonard saw the village people fleeing here and there, the majority of them

seeming to have just arisen from bed, while at their heels galloped horsemen who shot and clubbed indiscriminately.

One look was enough to reveal the truth.

Leonard reeled back in horror.

"Merciful Heaven!" he gasped, "War-Wolf has turned against me; the Blackfeet are sacking the village!"

Agnes became as white as marble; too well she knew what that meant; her red lover had discovered her treachery and was keeping his oath.

He had come for revenge!

Temple, himself a good deal alarmed, sprung to the window and looked out. He saw a scene he never forgot. The rain was not then falling, and, despite what had fallen, the cabins were burning furiously. Every building except Leonard's seemed to have been given up to the flames; and over the village hung a lurid light which served as the specter of assassination's torch.

Back and forth galloped the Blackfeet, slaying indiscriminately, and as the last vestige of secrecy had been thrown off, yells and war-whoops were added to the sound of fire-arms. The resistance was almost a myth; taken by surprise, the settlers seemed to have but one thought—to escape to the hills.

Temple turned to his allies.

"We must get out of this at once!" he exclaimed. "It is our only hope and—"

"Remain here," said Leonard, nervously. "Help me defend the house, and whatever you ask is yours!"

"No!" answered Temple, sharply. "Your chosen allies have turned upon you, and you must take the consequences. Come, friends, let us escape while we can."

But they were too late. The tread of many feet sounded outside the room. Temple, Mountain Cat, Golightly and Brown sprung to one corner of the room, and placing Missouri behind them, prepared to fight to the last.

Then in surged the Blackfeet, with War-Wolf at their head. He no longer came as the lover, and his face was dark with passion, while the knife he clutched showed gory stains which told a tale not to be mistaken.

One swift glance he swept around the room.

"Let no hand be raised against them!" he said, pointing to the desperate group in the corner. "They have been Leonard's foes; for that reason they shall live. I have only to deal with Leonard and his daughter!"

Agnes cowered in speechless fear; his eyes seemed to burn like coals of fire.

"Woman!" he added, in a terrible voice, "I have come for my squaw!"

She dropped upon her knees.

"Mercy! mercy!" she implored.

"I will give the mercy you have shown. Did I not say that if you played me false the village streets should run red with blood? Look outside!—see the dead men; see the red flames lap the cabins. Ha! ha! by morning not one roof shall be standing in Quartz Rock. Leonard, the wine you gave War-Wolf he gave away, in turn. He gave it to Walking Eagle—the traitorous dog you hired to kill the Blackfoot chief—and he drank and died. Then I knew why you were so anxious I should drink it here—even as I suspected then. See the result!"

He pointed to the burning cabins and his face was terrible. Before another word could be said, however, cries of dismay sounded from the Blackfeet outside the house. War-Wolf listened intently. The cries became distinct.

"The Evil Spirit! the Evil Spirit!"

War-Wolf staggered back.

"Lightning Bolt!" he gasped, in terror.

One moment he seemed weak as a child; then he sprung at Leonard and knocked him down with one blow. Next, turning, he caught Agnes in his arms and, despite her wild cry for help, dashed from the room.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONCLUSION.

ALL the Blackfeet promptly followed War-Wolf, and Temple hastened to the window and looked out.

Lightning Bolt was, indeed, busy.

The young man saw several Indians in precipitate flight, closely pursued by the avenger. The bounds of the Giant Elk were something wonderful, and he rapidly cut down the distance between them. A stream of fire shot through the air—one of the far-famed fire-bolts—and bursting, left two of the Blackfeet lifeless on the ground.

Another moment, and elk and rider were upon them. The latter struck out right and left, while Samson battled like a veritable demon. Nothing could stand before his antlers and hoofs.

The tide of victory had abruptly changed; the conquerors of the miners had been conquered in turn; Lightning Bolt had put the entire band to flight.

Temple was still watching with rapt interest, when Gaffer pulled at his sleeve.

"This ark is taken afire, too," he said; "an' ef we don't want ter be burnt up, we had better git."

Sure enough, smoke was gathering around them, and they beat a hasty retreat. Leonard

had received a severe blow from War-Wolf, but he was still alive, and as they would not see him die such a death, he was carried out and laid on the ground.

Every building in the village was doomed; that much was sure; and the red light illuminated the whole space from the river to the northern gulches. It was nearly a depopulated place, too; miners and Indians were alike gone; that small group seemed the only living persons there.

While they were trying to decide on their proper course, Leonard opened his eyes and looked around. It was clear he was near death, but he struggled to his feet. He gazed on the scene of ruin, and then put his hand to his head with a groan.

"This is terrible!" he said.

No one answered, but at that moment Beriah Brown was pushed aside and Lightning Bolt confronted the dethroned king of Quartz Rock. He was on foot, but Samson was at his heels. The late fury of battle had died from his face, and he seemed perfectly calm as he looked at the wounded man.

"Isaac Leonard, I have come for vengeance!" he said, in a deep voice.

The ex-king put up his hands despairingly.

"Good heavens! who next?" he exclaimed.

"What have I done to you? Who are you?"

"My name is Waldron Temple!"

Lightning Bolt answered in a deep, impressive voice, but it was not that which caused the silence which followed. It was the name—the name!

Leonard struck his forehead.

"It is a lie!" he cried wildly. "Waldron Temple died a score of years ago!"

"Not so," the Elk Rider steadily answered.

"He still lives. He escaped your plot to imprison him in the Illinois State's prison; he escaped the death to which you doomed him when you led the soldiers against the Pawnee village, and now he has come for vengeance! Twice have I gathered a family around me, and twice I have lost all at your hands. What has happened since I was so nearly drowned in the river, near the Pawnee village, I do not know. The greater part of the time I have been a madman; I believe there was at least ten years when I did not have a lucid interval; but these mental blanks have been gradually growing fewer and shorter, and I am nearly myself.

"At the end of one of my insane periods I found myself among these foothills, making relentless war on the Blackfeet under Bounding Bison. Why I did it I did not at first know, but later I recognized him to be Dave Abbott, a man who had been Isaac Leonard's tool in the past; and soon after I recognized you, too. I swore to kill you both, and my vow has been partially kept. Abbott, *alias* Bounding Bison, has died at my hands, and now I am come to send you after your tool!"

He raised his hand, but Leonard spoke quickly.

"No, no! I am not so guilty as you think. Your two sons still live. They are here; behold them!"

He pointed to Temple and Mountain Cat. Lightning Bolt put his hand to his head, but as Missouri saw a dark frown cross his face she went to his side.

"You remember me, don't you, sir? We are all your friends, and these men are your sons. You can believe me, you know. See! Samson knows me!"

"Ay, and so do I," said the Elk Rider. "You are kind and good; and no deceit is in your heart. I will believe what you say. But these young men—why, my boys died in childhood!"

"You are mistaken; they live. One of them even bears the name you gave him, years ago—Waldo Temple!"

"I thought it sounded familiar!" Lightning Bolt exclaimed. "I now see where I heard it. Well, if they are my sons, we shall be glad to see them—Samson and I. Ha! what was that?"

It was a heavy fall. Isaac Leonard had tried to take advantage of the fact that all were looking at Lightning Bolt, to steal away, but the blow received from War-Wolf was doing its work and he had not gone over ten feet when he staggered and fell.

They bent over him, but he was past human aid and human vengeance. Life had sped; and there in the midst of the town he had created, with abundant stores of gold at his service, he lay as helpless clay as the ground which upheld him.

When day dawned the sun managed to look through the scattered clouds. Its beams fell on a scene of ruin and desolation where Quartz Rock had once stood. Not a house remained in the village. Such of the people who were still alive were mournfully surveying the ruins.

Through the expanse of ruin lay white men and Blackfeet, side by side, their faces still distorted with rage or fear.

And where were they to whom all this desolation was really attributable? Isaac Leonard was dead, and Agnes was a prisoner in the hands of War-Wolf. The Blackfeet had gone completely, never to return, and with them had gone the woman whose crime had recoiled so terribly on herself.

War-Wolf had won and secured his squaw.

Our friends had retired to a cave of which Mountain Cat knew, and, while preparing to leave the vicinity, all that was possible was done for Lightning Bolt.

There could be no doubt but he was Waldron Temple, the father of Waldo and of Mountain Cat. His mind became even clearer, and he minutely described his old Chicago home, as well as gave all the family names. His newly-found sons hoped his mental aberrations would not again return.

Opportunity was afforded them to examine the fire-bolts, from the use of which he had gained the reputation of being a supernatural being. They were only another illustration of that half-natural, half-insane ingenuity we once before had cause to mention in his arrangement of his cave.

The fire-bolts were but a species of bomb-shell. The interior was filled with powder and various missiles, while outside the thin shell of bark was a coating of flannel, which was saturated with some highly combustible fluid. Before launching one of them he struck a contrivance of his own invention which was similar to a percussion-cap, and as this communicated fire to the flannel, it would blaze up fiercely for a moment.

At the end of a certain time—about equal to the time required for the bomb to move a hundred feet, if forcibly thrown—the fire would eat through to the powder, causing the explosion, and the missiles would deal death.

It was with these he had terrified and destroyed the Blackfeet.

He was perfectly willing to abandon his old life, and as he had taken a strong fancy to Mountain Cat, and an equally strong one to the idea of going on a cattle-ranch—where he could retain the Giant Elk, as he confessed—it was formally decided that Mountain Cat should become a ranchman in Nebraska, and keep his father with him.

For Temple he seemed to have no natural affection.

Before noon the little party, which consisted of Missouri, Temple, Mountain Cat, Lightning Bolt, Gaffer, Beriah and the Adams brothers, left Quartz Rock never to return. The river had grown sufficiently calm so that it could be safely crossed, and they went over in the boats.

Missouri looked at her lover with a faint smile.

"You see the Brown Hand Ferry and its mistress have survived its enemies, and even the town which patronized it," she said.

"Yes, but I do not believe she would willingly undergo, again, the perils she has met in the past to hold the ferry."

"I am satisfied, and so, I think, are you. But for the Brown Hand Ferry, we would never have known each other."

"And now that the ferry is no longer of use, we will never part," he added.

When they reached the land the boats were set adrift. They swung around, drifted, were caught by the current, and then went shooting down to be ground in pieces in the raceway.

It was the last act in the battle for the ferry.

Once more the party looked back at the still-smoking ruins, and then their way was resumed toward civilization.

Five years later a company of soldiers attacked and conquered the village of a band of hostile Indians, who were led by a chief known as War-Wolf. He fell, desperately fighting and covered with wounds, with his face to the foe.

When the strife was over a white woman was found dying with those of red skin. A chance shot had struck her and ended her life. As the soldiers bent over her she spoke five words and died. The words were:

"My name is Agnes Leonard!"

So faint a clue seemed to give no light on her history, and the world knows it not to-day; but when, in his happy Chicago home, Waldo Temple read the article, he could not but remember the wicked, but unfortunate, woman.

We need scarcely say Temple and Missouri were married. The latter, of course, resumed her real name, which she had abandoned when so bravely seeking to earn her own livelihood; and no happier home than theirs can be found.

The Adams brothers are also in Chicago, where they are doing well financially.

Gaffer Golightly and Beriah Brown will live and die in the Far West. To them, it surpasses all other places.

Of Jack Purcell and Mike Mulloy we have no further record at present.

Mountain Cat is a prosperous Nebraska farmer. He has recently married a woman of his own mixed blood, and all men honor him. His father has remained with him and has kept his mind under very good control, though he is never so happy as when galloping over the prairie on the back of Samson.

And in Montana, red men and white still tell of Lightning Bolt and his Giant Elk. The account has been changed, exaggerated or dwindled, according to the fancy of the narrator, but in these pages we have recorded the true story of the Elk Rider.

THE END.

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